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MADAME  
BHIKHAIJI RUSTOM  
CAMA

நவபாரதச் சிற்பிகள் நவகால நிர்மாணக்  
 கலைஞர்கள்  
 आधुनिक भारत के निर्माता BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA आधुनिक  
 ভারতের স্রষ্টা আধুনিক ভাৰতৰ নিৰ্মাতা আধুনিক ભારતના ધર્વેયા અધુનિક  
 భారతద నిర్మాణకులు ఆధునిక భారతచే శిల్పకారు ఆधुనిక ଭାରତର  
 ନିର୍ମାତା आधुनिक-भारतस्य निर्मातारः नव-भारत के निर्माता  
 நவபாரதச் சிற்பிகள் நவகால நிர்மாணக்  
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**MADAME BHIKHAJI  
RUSTOM CAMA**







***BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA***

# **MADAME BHIKHAIJI RUSTOM CAMA**

**Khorshed Adi Sethna**



**PUBLICATIONS DIVISION**  
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## About the Series

The objective of this series is to record, for the present and future generations, the stories of the struggles and achievements of the eminent sons and daughters of India who have been instrumental in our national renaissance and attainment of independence. Except in a few cases, such authoritative biographies have not been available.

The series is planned as handy volumes written by knowledgeable people giving a brief account, in simple words, of the life, time and activities of these eminent leaders. They are not intended either to be comprehensive or to replace the more elaborate writings.





# Introduction

When Publications Division approached me to undertake the biography of Madame Bhikhaiji Rustom Cama, I accepted with enthusiasm tempered with apprehension. This fascinating figure of our freedom struggle deserves a higher place in our country's history than has been accorded so far. I feared however, that she would prove an elusive figure and to augment the sketchy material available about her life and activities, would be an almost impossible task. My fears proved well founded, of her wide circle of friends and associates, none were alive; hardly any of her own letters or records were available; only a few persons who had met her, or knew of her, could provide the personal reminiscences so important in a biography. But as my apprehensions grew, so did the fascination. To follow the trail of this remarkable lady became a challenge I could not resist.

From the personal records left by her fellow revolutionaries, from the historic episodes of her very unusual career, from Intelligence Reports and material in the National Archives and the Jawaharlal Nehru Library at Delhi; and from the few relatives and friends who had cared to recall and record their association with her, a stirring story unfolded. And there emerged the fascinating world of India House, of dedication and defiance, of a band of young revolutionaries abroad striving and sacrificing for their *Bande Mataram*, of a noble born woman sharing their struggles, proudly upholding her beloved tricolour.

The dearth of information was frustrating. But I realized that if I let this opportunity pass even the available material about her would pass into oblivion and the memory of a remarkable patriot would be allowed to fade away. Besides

Manek Laher, my editor was not one to let me give up and it was only due to her support, guidance and encouragement that I persisted. I am grateful to her for alternately and cleverly coaxing and coercing me until the task was completed.

I can put forward no special claim to justify my writing Madame Bhikhaiji Cama's biography. But, besides my interest in an unusual personality and an urge to popularize the work of this pioneer patriot is the fact that we belong to the same community and religion. And by a strange quirk of coincidence we share a common birthday—24th September.

In India's struggle for independence Gandhiji is rightly accorded pride of place as the Father of the Nation, the man who infused a new spirit into India's masses and waged an unconventional struggle to free India from the foreign yoke. No one can deny or belittle the contribution of Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru and their coworkers to our freedom struggle. But what is often overlooked is that India's wish and struggle to be free did not begin with the formation of the Congress. And that, besides the conventional congressmen, many others made an undoubted and outstanding contribution—men and women who sacrificed their all so that India would be free.

'Madame' gives the impression that Bhikhaiji Cama was a foreigner. In fact, she was one of the most patriotic Indians who ever lived and though nearly half her life and most of her active life was spent abroad, it was spent in the service of her Motherland, speaking, writing, fighting for the cause of India's independence. Some may question her methods, none can doubt her patriotism.

Unfortunately, the earlier, revolutionary aspect of our freedom struggle is so neglected that even educated well read Indians have asked about Madame Bhikhaiji Cama "who was she?" To answer that question has been for me, a labour of love.



## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the many people from whom I have received generous help and encouragement in my research for this biography.

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## Formative Years

IT WAS August 22, 1907. Nearly a thousand delegates from different countries had gathered at Stuttgart for the Second International Socialist Congress. In the course of its deliberations, a woman delegate rose to speak, a lovely lady, of fairish complexion and large dark eyes, dressed in an exotic flowing garment with an exquisite border of delicate embroidery, its edge draped demurely over her head.

But there was nothing demure or delicate about the lady or her speech as she hurled defiance at the mighty British empire. She had captivated the audience by her very presence and personality. She now held them spellbound by the logic, sincerity and emotion of her fiery, eloquent speech, as she pointed out the iniquities and atrocities of British imperialism, described the sufferings, the agony of her countrymen and appealed to all those gathered there “to cooperate in freeing from slavery the one fifth of the whole human race inhabiting that oppressed country”. <sup>1</sup>At the end of her brilliant speech,<sup>2</sup> in a dramatic gesture, she unfurled a tricolour flag of green, saffron and red, passionately declaiming:

“This flag is of Indian independence. Behold it is born. It is already sanctioned by the blood of martyred Indian youths. I call upon you, gentlemen, to rise and salute this flag of Indian independence. In the name of this flag,

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1 & 2 Published by the Sectt. of the Bureau of the Socialist International, Brussels.

I appeal to lovers of freedom all over the world to cooperate with this flag in freeing one fifth of the human race.”

That lady, who dared to defy the might of an empire, who made HISTORY by unfurling India's first national flag on foreign soil and thus succeeded in focusing world attention on India's plight and problems was an Indian—a Parsee Lady from Bombay, Bhikhaiji Rustom Cama.

The impact she made is vividly described in the words of Prof Weidmann about the press reactions to that momentous event. He states that the International Socialist Congress at Stuttgart was severely attacked by European reactionaries and big press, but adds :

The appearance of Madame Cama, however, left its mark even on ultra conservative circles as the following example shows. The 'Leipziger Zeitung' (German newspaper) regarded it as an undoubted culmination of the Congress when the exotic appearance of Indian Mrs Kramas (Cama) dressed with shimmering silken garments entered the rostrum and appealed to the Congress to help the people oppressed by England and at last displayed a silken tricolour, the banner of the oppressed. Then the cheers of the International would not end.

The heroine of this episode, this valiant daughter of Mother India, was born on September 24, 1861, in an affluent Parsee family in Bombay. Her father was Sorabji Framji Patel, a prosperous businessman, her mother Jijibai. As they welcomed this fair, round faced little girl into their already large family, little could the fond parents have foreseen that she would grow up to a firebrand revolutionary in the cause of India's freedom; go overseas, far from the confines of a well to do Parsee home in Bombay to spend nearly half her life in a



small pension (boarding house) in Paris. And that the tricolour flag which she would be the first to hoist in a foreign land, would one day proudly flutter over the Sachivalaya and in Bombay a road would be named after her, Madama Cama Road.

1861 must have been a particularly propitious year for India. In that year three children were born who were to work in their widely differing ways and spheres for the glory of their Motherland and were destined to leave their indelible mark on his history - Motilal Nehru in a Kashmiri Pandit family at Agra; Rabindranath Tagore in a cultured Bengali home in Calcutta and Bhikhaiji in a Parsee merchant's mansion at Bombay.

Very little is known about this family that contributed the first Indian woman revolutionary to fight for India's freedom from British rule. But of their affluence there is no doubt. British Intelligence Reports about Madame Cama, speak of Sorabji Patel having formed a Trust giving thirteen lakh rupees to each of his sons and one lakh rupees to each of his eight daughters. Enormous sums in those days. Obviously Sorabji's business ventures were flourishing. Her brother Ardeshir Patel seems to have inherited his father's business acumen. He became very prosperous and endowed charities and a Parsee *agiyari* (Fire Temple) in Bombay. A large share of the family jewellery was given by her doting mother Jijibai, to Bhikhaiji when in 1902 she had to go abroad for medical treatment—little realizing what use the precious family heirloom would be put to. For Bhikhaiji dedicated and selfless, did not hesitate to sell even her personal jewellery to further the cause of her country's freedom.

Fortunately for her, Bhikhaiji was born into a community which was progressive and forward looking and in which women's education and emancipation were espoused and encouraged. In 1848, under the leadership of the redoubtable



Dadabhai Naoroji, a group of young Parsee reformers had started 'The Students Literary and Scientific Society' which laid special and urgent emphasis on the hitherto neglected sphere of the education of young women. In this respect, the Parsees proved to be decades ahead of all other Indian communities. According to Eckehard Kulke, the Society's nine schools for girls were attended in 1855 by 740 girls, 475 of them Parsees, 178 Marathi Hindus and 87 Gujarati Hindus. Though initially the emphasis was on teaching in Gujarati, English was added as a medium of instruction after the seventies. As a forerunner of this trend the Alexandra Native Girls Education Institution founded by the Parsee Maneckji Cursetjee in 1863, came into prominence.

Maneckji Cursetjee was the first Indian to be enrolled as a member of the Royal Asiatic Society of England. It was in his own house and with only thirteen girl students, that the Alexandra Girls Education Institution was first started and he remained at the helm of affairs of the school for nearly twentyfive years. From that humble beginning it was to become one of the most prominent schools for girls in the country with students from all parts of India. It was in this school, recognized then, as now, as one of the best institutions for women's education in India that Bhikhaiji had her education both primary and secondary and, as if foreseeing her future role in life, she devoted herself to the study of European languages and became proficient in them.

The Parsees were generally considered pro British and were undoubtedly far and ahead, the most westernized community in India those days. We would not be wrong in presuming that Bhikhaiji was brought up in luxurious home with all the trappings and social norms of Victorian England. Rich and aristocratic Parsee homes with their aura of civilised cultured western sophistication were full of tasteful

accoutrements—from intricately carved black rosewood furniture to masses of flowers, embroidery and lace, the glitter of chandeliers and the twinkle of crystal. Mirrors and portraits in gilt frames were somehow tastefully juxtaposed with precious vases and jars and ivory-studded screens from the Orient—and the inevitable piano on which Parsee girls, willing or unwilling, were forced to practice scales under the watchful eyes of English governesses. More often than not, a portrait or two of British royalty proclaimed where their loyalty lay. For Parsees the mother tongue was Gujarati, but intensive use of the English language and a diligent study of English literature had led to writing and publishing of plays and poems in English by Parsee authors. Performances of English plays by local Parsee groups were avidly attended. Every sport popularized by the English in India - cycling, swimming, motor sports, flying was eagerly taken up and the English enthusiasm for cricket was fervently imitated.

The Parsee community allowed, nay encouraged, free association of women with men at public, social and other gatherings. This no doubt contributed to Bhikhaiji's unusual social and political awareness, her knowledge of and interest in public affairs. Even at a young age she evinced a well developed social outlook with well defined and clear cut political views. Bhikhaiji's childhood was undoubtedly sheltered and uneventful, but certainly not cloistered. The ivory tower of her sheltered upbringing could not imprison that inquiring sharp mind and rebellious spirit. Those were days of fervour and ferment. She could not help catch the fervour of the exciting happenings outside her home.

Parsees originally hail from Iran. They were decendants of those Persian refugees who fled their country to escape the persecution of the invading Arabs and seek shelter and freedom in India to practice their Zoroastrian faith. Women in



ancient Iran (from where the Parsees came) had, in comparison with women in Indian society, a position of relative equality—customs like child marriage, polygamy, and prohibition of widow remarriage had been unknown to them. These evils became the targets of attack of Parsee social reformers in India. While in 1842 Sir Jamsetji Jeejeebhoi had to have his daughters educated in strict secrecy fearing condemnation of this ‘Revolutionary’ innovation; by 1870 over a hundred Parsee girls had already had the benefit of a secondary education. This early popularization of higher education for girls, contributed to the rapid emancipation of Parsee women, giving them an edge over their sisters of other Indian communities. When Parsee reformers like Dadabhai Naoroji, the Cama family and Maneckji Cursetjee in midnineteenth century had allowed their wives and daughters to participate as equal partners at public dinners or at festivities, it had caused a sensation. But by 1890 this free and equal mingling of men and women was already a matter of course in the Parsee society of Bombay.

The westernisation of the community had led in some cases to a conscious anglicization of the women; copying of English manners and way of living had become one of the main goals of Parsee society. Where clothes were concerned, while men changed their attire, Parsee woman predominantly continued to wear the sari, even if, around the turn of the century a grotesque exaggeration of English fashions could be observed occasionally. Many thinking people of the community were alive however to the danger of this ‘anglicization’ process. A.S. Ginwala writing in ‘The Times of India’ April 19, 1884 warned: “Especially the Parsee girls would, under the conditions of education common at the time, run the danger of only becoming a parody upon her English sister.”

How was the young Bhikhoo affected by this environment and anglicization of her community? Though fluent in English



and European languages, fashionable in dress, mingling freely in society both native and English, there was no danger of Bhikhoo becoming a 'parody' on any Englishwoman. Young as she was, her individuality and passionate love for her Motherland, and pride in India's culture, heritage, languages; and her awareness of what the English had done to her country, could never have permitted her to be anything but a true Indian at heart, unaffected by the outward trappings of westernization.

That she was self-willed, strong headed, spirited and unconventional even from her early years, there can be no doubt. Mr Shiavux S. Cooper of Paris, whose brother was her contemporary and close friend recollects how. in her later years at Paris, she would relate that she was perhaps the first Parsee young lady to wear frocks and created a pretty scandal in her family circle. Though, she would add with a merry twinkle, that her teachers and fellow students had admired her. Well merited admiration it seems, judging by the photographs of her younger days she would display to her Paris friends. From these photographs Mr Cooper opines, "I must say she was indeed uncommonly good looking". Another Parsee gentleman, B. Bharucha who knew her since her young days, recollected in a speech how he used to bowl while she did the batting and that she was reputedly good at it. Her unconventionality and high spirits extended even to the playing of cricket, at that time exclusively a man's preserve.

In 1896, at the time of the plague epidemic in Bombay she was to don a white apron and nurse the patients in a public hospital run by the Parsee Panchayat. It was an unheard of thing, for a woman of her family background to nurse the sick in a public hospital. Both her own family and her in-laws were shocked and scandalized and, unlike the courageous

Bhikhaiji, afraid perhaps for their own safety. For in those days the plague vaccine had not yet been discovered. To her all this unusual, impulsive behaviour came naturally. She was to do many such unconventional, unheard of things in the course of her adventurous eventful life. She assisted Phirozeshah Mehta when he started the 'Bombay Chronicle' becoming thereby probably the first young Parsee woman to venture into the journalistic field. This experience was to stand her in good stead later when she helped in publishing much of the Indian revolutionary material from abroad.

Besides her social awareness, other characteristics apparent from her earlier days were her sharpness of intellect and growing interest in politics. Mr Charles Bradlaugh, the famous English free-thinker who had met her in Bombay in 1889, was highly impressed by her knowledge of public affairs. The introductory paragraph to 'An Indian Lady's Appeal to her Countrymen' in the June 1907 issue of the 'Indian Sociologist' refers to Madame Cama as "a lady of wide experience who has resided for five years in different parts of Europe and who has carefully studied many social and political questions of the day. For nearly twenty years she has interested herself in politics".

The atmosphere in which this young woman was brought up was far from placid. She was born only four years after the Mutiny of 1857. In the years she grew up to young womanhood a new spirit of defiance and independence was in the air. Repression fanned the flames of revolutionary ardour and secret societies sprang up under the leadership of Tilak in Maharashtra and Aurobindo Ghosh in Bengal. For a young person of her spirit and temperament this new upsurge of defiance and patriotic fervour found instant appeal and became a strong influence in moulding her future. It was to change, radically, the course of her life.



The social standing of her own family can be judged from the fact that her father was able to arrange a match for his favourite daughter with the scion of one of Bombay's wealthiest and best known Parsee families. Rustom Cama, only a year older than his prospective bride was all that any girl could have hoped for; good looking, wealthy, educated, a barrister from a prominent and progressive family. Her father-in-law was the renowned orientalist Prof. Khurshedji Rustomji Cama. He was liberal minded, an illustrious scholar and affectionate in his personal relationships. She greatly admired him and always evinced great respect for his knowledge and scholarship. Khurshedji Cama had joined his family firm, travelled to China, and Europe, then abandoned commerce and spent a year to go abroad and study the *Avesta* (scriptures of the Zoroastrians) under recognised western scholars like Mohl<sup>1</sup> in Paris and Spiegel at Erlangen, Bavaria, Germany. His companion on this voyage to England happened to be Dadabhai Naoroji who belonged to a priestly family of Navsari and was able to enlighten him about many of the tenets of Zoroastrianism. With his penetrating intellect and strong memory he learnt enough in that short spell abroad to be able on his return to Bombay to pursue *Avestan* and *Pahlavi* (vernacular of Persia from 300 B.C. onwards) studies by himself on western lines. He gathered around him a small class of remarkably gifted young priests and the fame of his teaching spread. Even today the Cama Institute of Oriental Studies is a landmark in Bombay. The Cama group was also India's fourth largest press concern in 1854 and it was they who made it financially possible for a newspaper 'Rast-Goftar' to be established by Dadabhai Naoroji.

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1. Julius Von Mohl (1800-76), German Orientalist, born at Stuttgart. From an early age was attracted to oriental studies, so he went in 1823 to Paris to study at the Société Asiatique. He became a professor of Persian at the College de France in 1847. His edition of the *Shah-nama* was published in six folio volumes.



The year 1885 was an important landmark in her life. It encompassed two important events; her marriage on August 3, and the first session of the Indian National Congress, presided over by Woomesh Chandra Bonnerji in December. For most women specially in those days marriage would have been the more significant event, perhaps the most important landmark in their lives. But for her it was not destined to be so. The young bride, keenly and enthusiastically followed the proceedings and deliberations of the Congress. It was indeed an epoch making event and she was one of the first Indian women to have grasped its importance, its historic significance. To her it was a movement which could awaken not only political consciousness but also social and economic awareness. From its beginning Congress afforded the women of India a great opportunity to participate as equals in the task of nation building. It would mean emancipation from the foreign yoke. It could also mean emancipation for women who had been oppressed for centuries. So she thought in 1885.

New horizons opened before her. The country beckoned her to service and her youthful mind reacted with idealistic ardour. At this call of her Motherland she emerged out of the shell of complacency common to the affluent class to which she belonged. The needs of her country were too important, too imperative. No longer could she afford the luxury of the life of women of her social strata, whose aspirations were limited to proficiency at embroidery, music and the social graces and for whom the ultimate honour was an invitation to the Governor's garden party. Here was the noble cause to which she could, and she would, give her all. Young though she was, she had found her mission in life.

She was married to an outstanding young man. Most girls in her position and in her days, could not have asked for a better match and would have been satisfied with their

housewifely duties and social obligations. But she was different. She was wedded to an 'ideal' husband. But she was 'wedded' also, as she herself used to say, "to the uplift of my countrymen, both social and political." Ultimately it was this side of her that gained the upper hand. She became a woman with a mission, with a vision, the vision of an Independent India free from the foreign yoke. At this stage she must have faced a mental and emotional conflict. Brought up as she was in a home filled with beautiful things, in the warmth and love of a large family and circle of friends, she could not have escaped completely an attachment to the feminine and gracious aspects of life, the comforts, security and even fun. But there was also within her a restlessness, a drive of energy which never left her completely at peace. The poverty and sufferings of her people, the sheer helplessness of the Indian masses under a despotic foreign rule, deeply affected her. She was a society lady, a newly married woman aware that delight, comfort, beauty were life. But to her it was not enough. For within her, was also the dedicated reformer committed to social work outside the home, leading her first to involvement in improving the lot of women and later to ceaseless political activity. In the end it was this life, this work outside the home that was to claim her totally. Her home life, her duties as a young housewife gradually receded and in its place a new Bhikhaiji began to emerge.

Impatient with her husband who held more conservative views, had little interest in public life and who believed 'benevolence' of British rule, she gradually drifted away from him. The marriage, never a happy one, broke up, and within a few years they were separated, though never actually divorced. She however was fair minded and realistic enough to recognise and acknowledge that it was more her fault and she never spoke ill of her husband. He outlived her and was



so embittered perhaps, that when she died, he refused even to attend her last rites.

The viewpoints of husband and wife were poles apart and her fiery temper led to violent quarrels between them. 'Four Fighting Decades' by Homi D. Mistry mentions one such occurrence as narrated by the late Shiavux Jhabwala, a well known social worker, labour leader and revolutionary. It seems with the help of her husband, she used to run a journal devoted to social work and reforms. The premises once occupied by 'Blitz' were used, decades before, by the Daftar Askara Press, a pioneer press of India which printed this journal edited by the Camas. In the very room, which was much later to be occupied by the Deputy Editor of Blitz, husband and wife used to quarrel violently over editorial matter; and Mr Jhabwala was hesitant to face her when he had to go in with contributions for their journal. Incidentally, Mr Jhabwala himself was a revolutionary who had figured quite prominently in the Meerut Conspiracy Case, but, it appears even a brave man like him was afraid to face the fury of this firebrand.

At the time of the severe epidemic of plague in Bombay. she had thrown herself, heart and soul, into relief work, actually nursing the sick and dying, without thought of the danger she was exposing herself to. Fortunately she escaped the disease and lived to a ripe age. But her work amongst the plague victims, her awareness of the ravages of famine and economic depression that had ruined this once great and prosperous land, her witnessing with her own eyes, the sufferings of her countrymen during those closing years of the nineteenth century left an indelible mark on her sensitive heart. Realizing with her clarity of mind, how much these were due to the oppressive and self aggrandizing policies of a foreign government, she decided to fight to end this alien rule.



As the saga of the life of this unusual woman unfolds, it is fascinating to watch Madame Cama's evolution from social service, through a short spell of political work inspired by the ideals of the Conservative Congress to radical revolutionary activity and militant nationalism.

All her life, her indomitable spirit was willing; quite often, the flesh was weak. Ill health was to dodge her footsteps all through life. In 1902 gravely ill, she had to go abroad for treatment and an operation. Little could she have realized, as the ship sailed away from her native shores, that it was the beginning of an exile that was to last thirty five years, during the course of which she was to carve for herself an honoured niche in the annals of her country's struggle for freedom.

## The Parsees

BHIKHAIJI CAMA lived in exile, abroad half her life, yet remained patriotically Indian to the core. Though fluent in English and several European languages, she preferred to converse in Hindi or Gujarati with her compatriots. She met and mingled with people of different religions and communities, but she remained faithful to the religion and community she was born into and lived, and died a staunch Parsee.

As she remained a practising Zoroastrian throughout her life and the tenets of her faith had a potent influence in the shaping of her life, her beliefs and conduct, it would not be out of place to give a brief history of the Parsee community and the precepts of their ancient Zoroastrian faith.

The original homeland of the Parsee was the Persian Province Pars or Fars, ancient Pasargadae in Southern Iran. The Parsecs of today are the decendants of Persian refugees who emigrated to India over 1200 years ago, after the Arab conquest of Persia. They form a miniscule minority, representing less than 0.016 per cent of India's vast population, yet their impact on the country's society, economics, commerce and politics has been remarkable and out of all proportion to their numerical strength. This was specially so in Bhikhaiji's days, in the period between 1880 and 1920.

The Parsees, followers of the prophet Zoroaster of ancient Iran, had come to India seeking freedom to practice their faith. Zoroastrianism is a religion belonging to the remote dawn of civilization, its actual date of origin shrouded in the

mists of antiquity. There is controversy concerning the date of Zoroaster's actual historical appearance and it is impossible to establish fixed dates for his life. But there is evidence to suggest that he flourished most probably between 1700 B.C. and 1500 B.C.

Originating thus over 3500 years ago, Zoroastrianism is the oldest of the revealed world religions having its roots in a very dim and distant past. First preached among Nomads on the Asian Steppes, it was destined to become the state religion of three great Iranian empires—the Achaemenian, Arsacid and Sasanian from the 6th century B.C. to the 7th century A.D. and to influence many other world faiths because of its noble character and the prominent position of Iran between the Graeco Roman world and Asia. Under the Achaemenians, 550-330 B.C. in the days of kings like Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius the great and Zerxes, ancient Iranian culture reached its zenith. Later, under the Sasanians (226-651 A.D.) Zoroaster's teachings were revised and flourished as a State religion. This Iranian Zoroastrian Empire came however to a sudden and violent end in the 7th century, with the conquest of Iran by the Islamic Arabs. The exodus of the Parsees was the direct outcome of this forced Islamization of Iran.

The first of the 'Holy Wars' was waged by the young Arab nation in 633 A.D., a year after Prophet Mohammed's death. By 651 A.D., with the fall and death of the King Yazdagird, the Arab conquest of Iran was complete. About the subsequent history of the Parsees the only written document is the '*Kissah-i-Sanjan*' (in Persian couplets) by Bahman Kaikobad, a High Priest of Navsari. Though written as late as in 1600 A.D., centuries after the actual events and containing some discrepancies, it is a very valuable source material of Parsee history as no earlier document exists.



According to the *Kissah* with the loss of sovereignty of Yazdagird in 651 A.D., a number of Zoroastrians to avoid persecution and forcible conversion to Islam, abandoned their homes, gardens and palaces and fled to the inhospitable mountains of Kohistan. After remaining there for 100 years and fearing further religious persecution, they proceeded to the Persian Gulf Port of Hormuz. Fifteen years thereafter they decided to set sail for India and landed in 766 A.D. at Diu, an island to the south of Kathiawar where they were to spend the next nineteen years. They set sail again for Gujarat, landing at Sanjan, a small fishing village in 785 A.D.

On the way from Diu to Sanjan, a severe storm arose and the voyagers feared shipwreck. Desperate, they vowed that if they survived and landed safely they would build an *Atash Behram* (fire temple) as an act of thanksgiving to God. They honoured this vow and the first *Atash Behram* in India is believed to have been consecrated around 790 A.D. They sent for several ritual objects and ash for the ceremonies of consecration from Khorasan thus giving their new fire a link with the sacred fire of their old homeland.

At Sanjan the local Hindu ruler Jadi Rana or Jadhav Rana gave them shelter and liberty to establish a colony of their own and to follow their own faith. However, he imposed five conditions – The Parsee High Priest was to explain their religion to the Rana; they were to adopt Gujarati as their mother tongue; all their weapons were to be surrendered; Parsee women would wear the sari and their wedding ceremonies and processions were to be held after sunset.

A more colourful and vivid version of this encounter between the Persian refugees and Jadhav Rana is conveyed through the Gujarati *Garbas*-group songs composed by the Parsee women on the happy occasions of *Navjotes* (sacred thread ceremony) and weddings. Piloo Nanavutty in her book

‘The Parsis’ (p. 40) gives beautifully the prose translation of the story which was traditionally sung in verse.

I can do no better than quote her :

“What is it you want from us, O strangers from a far land?” asked Jadhav Rana.

“Freedom of worship, Sire,” replied the old priest.  
“Granted. What else do you wish?”

“Freedom to bring up our young in our own traditions and customs”.

“Granted. What else do you wish?”

“A small piece of land that we could cultivate, so that we may not be a burden to the people among whom we live.” “Granted. In return, what will you do for the country of your adoption?”

The old priest asked for a brass bowl to be filled with milk and brought to the assembly. This was done. He then stirred a spoonful of sugar in the bowl and holding it up in his trembling hands, asked: “Does any man see the sugar in this bowl of milk?” All shook their heads.

“Sire,” said the priest “We shall try to be like this insignificant amount of sugar in the milk of your human kindness.”

The Parsees lived up to this promise and fully integrated themselves into the land of their adoption. In 1200 A.D. Parsee Priest Nariosang Dhaval took trouble to translate, presumably for the benefit of Hindu scholars, the entire *Avesta* into Sanskrit. At Parsee wedding ceremonies the prayers are to this day recited also in Sanskrit. Parsee ladies predominantly wear the sari and while visiting the fire temple and at wedding and other ceremonies the *pallav* is draped over the right shoulder in the original Gujarati fashion.

In 1465, during the Muslim invasion of Sanjan the Parsees valiantly fought alongside their Hindu benefactors. Sanjan however was destroyed and sacked. The priest rescued the *Atash Behram* and carried it to safety to a cave on an isolated peak fourteen miles away. After twelve years it was taken to Bansda where it remained for two years. One of the pilgrims to Bansda was a man called Changa Asa, a wealthy layman of Navsari and one of the great men of Parsee history. He proposed to the Sanjan priests that they should bring the sacred fire to Navsari and offered a fine house for this purpose. The sacred fire remained in Navsari for over 200 years but was moved between 1740-42, first to Bulsar, then to Udvada, where, formally installed in 1742 it has remained to this day, making Udvada the Mecca of the Parsecs.

About 300 years after that encounter with Jadhav Rana at Sanjan, the Parsees dispersed in different directions, going to Broach, Variav, Ankleswar, Cambay, and Navsari. By the 18th century we find them flourishing in Surat, then the emporium of the East. Early in the 19th century they left Surat for Bombay, the hub of European commercial activity, the commercial decline of Surat as well as the famines that desolated Gujarat, hastening this exodus.

The early Parsees of Gujarat were engaged mainly in agricultural pursuits but over the centuries they were to take up trades like carpentry, cabinet making, ship building and later acted as brokers and agents for European merchants and factory owners. With their adventurous spirit they were the first to venture to China and Burma for a profitable trade. By early 19th century, they were rich and influential, reputed for honesty and benevolence. Bombay undoubtedly owes much of its present greatness to the industry and enterprising spirit of the Parsees. One of the early Parsees to do the community proud was Dastur Meherji Rana (1536-1591) of Navsari, who



expounded the Zoroastrian religion at the court of Akbar and participated in religious debates.

In 1842 the Parsee merchant Jamsetji Jeejeebhoi was made the First Indian Baronet of the British Empire. The earliest Indians to avail themselves of Western education, Parsee soon fitted themselves for entering the professions of medicine, law and engineering, and filling the high posts in government and in political life. Parsee women did not lag behind where education was concerned and were among the first Indian women to acquire degrees.

The first Indian to be elected to the British House of Commons was a Parsee Dadabhai Naoroji in 1892. Their close contact with European merchants gave Parsees the know how of trade and business organisations. This, combined with their enterprise, willingness to learn and high level of education, laid the foundation of their subsequent economic and social eminence.

The Parsecs had the highest percentage of literacy in India in the 19th century. A survey undertaken in 1884 of Indians studying in England for higher studies shows that Parsees contributed 24% of the Indian students. Branching out into their own business enterprises, Parsees amassed enormous fortunes. Having imbibed the techno-economical knowledge and commercial know how and possessing the required financial resources, they were able to introduce the important textile industry into India. It was a Parsee, Jamsetji Tata, who laid the foundation of India's iron and steel industry at Jamshedpur, started the Hydro Electric works at Lonavala. Realizing the importance of science in the twentieth century gave the country its first scientific institution—the Indian Institute of Science at Bangalore. Though Tata maintained close contact with the Indian National Congress through people like Dadabhai Naoroji and Dinshaw Wacha, he differed from them in his

belief that without economic independence, the political independence of India would be meaningless.

Rabindranath Tagore in 'The Religion of Man' has given a beautiful and lucid exposition of Zoroaster's teachings.

According to him, "Zoroaster was the greatest of all the pioneer prophets who showed the path to freedom to man, the freedom of moral choice, freedom from the multiplicity of shrines." He goes on to say: "Zoroaster was the first prophet who emancipated religion from the exclusive narrowness of the tribal God, the God of a chosen people, and offered it the universal man ..The active heroic aspect of this religion reflects the character of the people themselves, who later on spread conquests far and wide and built up great empires. Their ideal was the ideal of the fighter. By force of will and deeds of sacrifice they were to conquer *haurvatat*—welfare in this world and *ameretat*—immortality in the other."

A life of Righteousness; a life of active goodwill towards one's fellowmen, is the essence of Zoroaster's teaching hence the simple but profound motto "good thoughts, good words, good deeds." In the battle between good and evil every individual human being is called upon to stand up for the good through his own free will and defend it actively. In this cosmic battle whoever fights against lies, misfortune, discord, illness, poverty and immorality – the offspring of evil in this world – is supporting the good. Evil is not to be tolerated, taken for granted or condoned but it is to be actively countered, fought against, and overcome.

Zoroaster's was a militant ethical ideal to wage a relentless war against evil in whatever form and in whatever place it is found. As a soldier takes an oath of loyalty to the king, so is every Zoroastrian enjoined to array himself on the side of the King of Kings, to wage a stubborn, heroic fight against



squalor, destitution, disease, falsehood, inequity, vice and wickedness.

Zoroaster also taught that the only path to happiness lies in bringing happiness to others. The pursuit of happiness is the aim of all mankind, but the way to it is often mistaken and misrepresented. Zoroaster summarizes the true method in the opening stanza of the *Ustavad Gatha* as “Happiness is the lot of him who works for the happiness of others”. He alone can be happy who loves and serves the homeless, the dispossessed, the afflicted of the earth. Thus, to the Parsecs wealth brings social obligations with it. Scarcely any of the rich Parsee financial and industrial magnates evaded this obligation, their charitable donations taking the form of foundations for long term public welfare purposes, schools, technical and industrial training institutes, hospitals, housing projects, homes for the aged, orphanages and libraries. This charity is not limited to Parsees only. (There is hardly a second community which has such a comprehensive public welfare system at its disposal and, this system was founded at the initiative of its own members without government’s assistance or intervention.)

How far did Madame Bhikhaiji Cama follow the precepts of her religion? To actively fight against evil and to her the worst evil was the foreign domination which had ruined her beloved country was the motto of her life. *RESISTANCE TO TYRANNY IS OBEDIENCE TO GOD* were her off-quoted words. The means she employed for this fight against evil may be questioned by some as going against the ethics of most religions. But to her the ends for which she was fighting, justified the means used.

She was also true to Zoroaster’s second commandment for she was constantly working for the happiness of others, by helping others, whether it was the suffering plague victims or, the destitute Savarkar family. Throughout her life she was



concerned with the redemption of her countrymen and later of the people of all subject nations. She fought tirelessly the evils of ignorance, poverty, exploitation and oppression.

Zoroaster had enjoined his followers to wear a uniform as soldiers in the cause of *Ahura Mazda*—the *Sudrah* and the *Kusti*. As the Zoroastrian religion emphasized free will and freedom of choice, a child born of Zoroastrian parents becomes a Zoroastrian only when he or she chooses the faith at the *Navjote* ceremony, when he or she is invested with these two symbols of the religion.

The *Sudrah* worn next to the body is a garment of white cloth mainly of muslin or cotton, white symbolizing purity. At the bottom of its V-shaped neck is a little pocket—a square inch sized ‘purse’ known as the *Kisseh-i-Kerfeh*, meaning pocket of good deeds. It is a reminder to the wearer that in the face of the vast goodness of God whatever good we humans can do is only a small square inch by comparison, and that he should continually try to fill the pocket with the merit of good thoughts, good words and good deeds, (thus laying up treasures for himself for his journey to the hereafter).

Symbolizing the tenets of the faith is the sacred thread, the *Kusti*, woven of 72 threads of fine lamb’s wool, representing the 72 chapters of the *Yasna*, the book of worship. The *Kusti* is to woven only by members of the priestly class sanctified by special prayers to be recited while it is woven. Zoroastrian men and women wear this sacred thread over the *Sudrah* passed three times around the waist and knotted in front and back. After the *Navjote* ceremony every Zoroastrian must, every day, untie and retie the *Kusti* while reciting special prayers. The first short prayer taught to every Zoroastrian child is the *Ahunvar* or *Athaovar*. It is to be uttered when ever in need, as potent prayer (in place of other forms of worship or supplication).

Inspite of her modern outlook and sophisticated attitude towards life, Madame Cama never parted with her *Sudrah* and *Kusti* and a small book of *Khordeh Avesta* was always in her handbag. Those youngsters who after their so-called 'education' in the United States or England forgot their heritage and gave up the practice of *Sudrah* and *Kusti*, she mocked at with humour and sarcasm. It was also a habit with her to keep repeating the words of the short *Ahunvar* or *Athaovar* prayer constantly. According to her own confession to a relative of hers, Bani Batlibhoy, who met her in France, the words of *Ahunvar* were constantly on her lips.

Even today most practicing Parsees continue to wear the *Sudrah* and *Kusti*. Women wear the *Sudrah* completely hidden under the sari blouse or other clothes. But in earlier days and in Bhikhaiji's time it was fashionable to exhibit the exquisite lace edge of the *Sudrah* from under the blouse. All the photographs of Madame Cama display this.

During India's long fight for freedom, Parsees as a whole maintained a neutral attitude. But the few men and women who were exceptions to this attitude, were eminent persons in the very vanguard of the struggle—Dadabhai Naoroji, the Grand Old Man of India who carried on the campaign both in India and abroad; Phirozeshah Mehta, the uncrowned king of Bombay who always claimed to be an Indian first and a Parsee afterwards; Dinshaw Wacha, a great parliamentarian and Madame Cama, one of the foremost among the revolutionaries.

Though the so-called 'loyalty' of the majority of Parsees to the British may have been begotten of the instinct of self preservation and self advancement, in the first meeting of the Indian National Congress, Parsees were prominently represented. At that early phase of the movement, leaders generally westernized intellectuals with an English academic background,



believed in being able to achieve their goal through peaceful petition and constitutional agitation. The end of this first phase was marked by the demand for *Swaraj* first expressed publicly by Dadabhai Naoroji in 1906.

For Dadabhai Naoroji his belonging to the Indian nation was even more important than his membership of the Parsee community. In his Presidential address in 1893 he stated, "Whatever I am, a Hindu, a Mohammedan, a Parsi, a Christian or any other creed, I am above all an Indian." Phirozeshah Mehta showed, as President of the Indian National Congress in 1890, his utter commitment to his Motherland in the following words: "If twelve centuries however, entitle Angles and Saxons, Norans and Danes to call themselves natives of England.... surely we are born children of the soil in which our lot has been cast for a period of over 13 centuries .... To my mind a Parsee is a better and firmer Parsee, as a Mohamedan or a Hindu is a better and truer Mohamedan or Hindu, the more he is attached to the land which gave him birth, the more he is bound in brotherly relations and affection to all the children of the soil."

Later, Barjorji Framji Bharucha was an ardent nationalist. Another Parsee, nationalist, courageous and independent in his views was Feroze Gandhi, about whom Gandhiji was to say, "If I could get seven boys like Feroze to work for me I will get *Swaraj* in seven days." Parsees in India should remember him with pride, not only because he was destined to become the son-in-law of a Prime Minister, the husband of another and now the father of India's youngest Prime Minister, but even more because he lived up to the tenets of his faith, exposing and fighting evil and corruption wherever he encountered it, without fear or favour.

Contrary to the impression given by Kulke, Parsee women were not lagging behind. Several Parsee women threw



themselves heart and soul into the struggle. It is a fact and pictorially recorded that hundreds of Parsee women came forward and demonstrated in the streets of Bombay in support of the Salt Satyagraha in 1930 and of Gandhiji's programme of boycott of British goods.

Among these, most active was Perin Captain, grand daughter of Dadabhai Naoroji. Sent to Paris in 1905 to learn the French language, she came under the influence of Madame Cama and like her was in sympathy with the struggle of national independence of other countries besides her own. In 1910, when the first Egyptian National Congress was held at Brussels, Bhikhaiji Cama together with Perin and her sister were asked to attend as delegates. In 1919 she came under Gandhiji's influence and was a devoted Congress worker thereafter.

But the most glorious example of a Parsees woman fighter, sacrificing herself for her Indian Motherland was none other than Madame Bhikhaiji Rustom Cama herself.

Before we end this chapter on the Parsees a couple of misconceptions about them need to be clarified and cleared. There is a belief generally prevalent that Parsees are 'fireworshippers'. This is an incorrect and mistaken idea. Fire to Parsees is an emblem of the Divine. It stands at the centre of Zoroastrian cult and no ceremony is performed without its presence. But it is present as the symbol for *Ahura Mazda*, the Light and the Truth. Fire represents light as opposed to darkness, energy and warmth representing life. It represents purity because physically fire burns up any filth flung into it but itself remains pure and unaffected. The sacred fire *Atash*, is kept burning day and night in the Fire Temple with offerings of sandalwood and incense. With its qualities and purity, fire to Parsees is an ideal symbol for the worship of God, but it does not make them fire-worshippers. No one

refers to Christians as cross worshippers or to Muslims as worshippers of the crescent and star.

In this connection when in 1892 after difficulties Dadabhai Naoroji was successfully elected as the Liberal Candidate from Central Finsburg, the Conservative Press to arouse racial prejudice had dubbed him 'a fireworshipping Asiatic'. A local paper 'The St. Stephen's Review' had stated: "Central Finsbury ought to be ashamed of itself at having publicly confessed that there was not in the whole of the Division, an Englishman or Scotsman, a Welshman or an Irishman as worthy of their votes as this fireworshipper from Bombay."

Another popular misconception is about the gruesomeness of the Parsee mode of disposal of the dead, generally looked upon as a barbaric custom. The Zoroastrians are repeatedly enjoined by their religion to take utmost care to keep the body and the natural elements, earth, fire and water pure. These should not be defiled specially through dead matter. This explains the injunction of the Towers of Silence, a circular enclosure with high walls but open to the sky, on the inside steps of which, bodies of the deceased are placed to be destroyed by birds of prey, because otherwise, would be defiled. (Incidentally, this method of disposal of bodies by exposure was followed in ancient times by the Bactrians and others.)

Today, among the Parsees, though this method is still followed but in many cities where Towers of Silence do not exist, there are Parsee burial grounds and even otherwise burial and cremation is resorted to by some Parsees of their own free will. A flexible attitude in this regard is gaining ground.

Madame Cama had lived in Paris for decades and had become old and infirm. Debarred from returning to her motherland and realizing that the end was approaching, she had selected for herself a grave in the famous Pere-La Chaise

cemetery, in the East section of Paris. She had even got the year 192—inscribed, leaving out the last figure. On the day Mr M.P.T. Acharya had gone to see her she took him to see the grave and ordered that the year 192—should be altered to 193, so long had the grave been waiting for her! But let us hear the story in Mr M.P.T. Acharya's own words<sup>1</sup> :

Madame Cama had been suffering for long years from facial paralysis and had her skull broken in a taxi accident. Her physic and brain were not functioning properly, but she bore her troubles with stoicism. She was sure that she would die anyday, in Paris, and had bought a space for her grave in Pere-La Chaise cemetery. One day, she took me to see the grave which was ready to receive her. Even the inscriptions were ready, carved on the tomb stone both in French and in her native tongue Gujarati. What did I read on the stone, *RESISTANCE TO TYRANNY IS OBEDIENCE TO GOD*. That was the principle of her life. As a Parsee who believed deeply in the teachings of Zoroaster, she said as she could not make arrangements to have herself offered in Paris, to vultures, according to her religion, she had to be buried. "But really" she added, "we have no right over bodies which belong to nature and therefore the vultures have right to them."

He concludes,

But just a few months before her death she received permission to return to her country and she died in India in 1936 and therefore she was able to allow herself to be devoured by the vultures after all!

Recently 'in the magazine 'Debonaire' there appeared an

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1. Mahratta, August 12, 1938.



interesting little anecdote in this regard about a well known young industrial tycoon of Bombay, Nusli Wadia. According to the report, during a television interview on BBC, Mr. Wadia was asked rather snidely by the interviewer, “You belong to the Zoroastrian community. Is it true that when you die, they feed you to the vultures?” Without batting an eyelid, Wadia shot back, “Yes, which is a sight better than being fed to the maggots!”

A more poetic explanation can be offered for this mode of disposal of the dead. Parsees are reputed for their philanthropy ‘Parsee, they name is charity’ so the saying goes. Therefore even in death the Parsee lives upto this reputation by donating his body to the birds.

One further misconception needs clarification here, since it concerns the subject of this biography i.e. the spelling of names. Bhicaji among Parsees is a boy’s name and Bhikhaiji, a girl’s. Even some of the writers of her life, have slipped up on this albeit tricky point. In appendix I and appendix II, we see how she herself spelled her name as Bhikhaiji.

## Tumultous Times

THE CONFLAGRATION of 1857 had died down but its embers still smouldered. The ruthless suppression of the Mutiny had spread terror among the people who felt it was not easy to drive the British out. But the feeling of revolt and the faith in revolution never died in their hearts. Yes, the embers still smouldered—waiting only for an opportune wind to fan them again into raging flames.

Sporadic resistance to British rule, mainly feudal in character, had existed right from the early days of the British conquest. This form of violent resistance, believing that the British conquerors should be ousted by armed revolt and by every possible means, was to reach its climax with the Mutiny of 1857 and thereafter lay dormant for nearly fifty years.

Meanwhile by the first half of the 19th century, another form of resistance had come into existence and was rapidly gaining ground. Its western educated leaders under the impact of English education and western ideas of liberty and equality, had placed their faith in Constitutional agitation. While fears of British military might had been instilled into the hearts of the masses and the glories of ancient India decried, the mental and moral conquest of a small minority of educated Indians had been effected through English Education.

This English educated minority of Indians had come to believe the myth perpetrated by the British that it was the benevolent foreigners who had brought in law and justice, peace and prosperity, to a land which was practically barbaric

and strife-torn before their arrival. There were many proofs of British benevolence—the spread of railways and communications, schools and colleges, and movements for social and religious reforms. If everything was not perfect and something still remained to be set right, it was only due to the bunglings of the bureaucrats and Britain was not to blame—that country which had given shelter to exiles like Marx, Mazzini, Garibaldi, and was the champion of justice and freedom for all nations. It only remained to appeal to the British people and parliament to rectify whatever wrongs existed and all would be well. So firm and deeply entrenched was this belief in British benevolence that it was to take many rude shocks to dislodge it.

This picture of the reality, the actual events and conditions in India could not quite fit into this rosy frame. Import of British goods spelt ruin for old indigenous industries, poverty was increasing, taxes were mounting while the spectre of famine and disease stalked the land. Theoretically, justice and equality were advocated, but the Imperial pageant of the Delhi Durbar sharply exposed the glaring inequality between the rulers and the ruled. Even the haughty ‘native’ princes were humbled and humiliated. Indians had become exiles in their own land, slaves in their own country. The Mutiny had resulted in a hardening of the British attitude towards Indians. They had become socially more aloof and arrogant, politically more unsympathetic, while their economic policies resulted in an ever increasing ‘drain of wealth’. British officials lived in comfort, isolated and insulated from the native life around them, gathered together in exclusive clubs and at ‘Just-like-home’ hill stations in summer. Undoubtedly there were a few Englishmen, erudite and humane, who contributed richly to the progress of this country, but these were the exceptions. The majority were lesser mortals selfishly concerned only with their power and prerogatives, their status and comforts.



While the Indian masses, crushed by burdens of poverty, famine and disease were being driven to despair, some of the intellectuals well versed in western political theory and history, resenting this arrogant attitude and unfair treatment, were awakening to the reality that no nation in the world had ever won its freedom without stress, strain and struggle. In the 1880's, ruined and degraded, politically, socially and economically, India had reached her lowest ebb. But in that dark period of her history one discovers faint glimmers of the dawn—a Renaissance, a new awakening, the birth of a new spirit of self-confidence and defiance—though the sunshine of freedom was as yet, only a faint and distant dream and the path to it destined to be long and arduous.

Leaders, who were imbued with a deeply religious spirit and pride in India's old traditions and heritage, and who possessed courage, patriotism and a spirit of self-sacrifice, came to the fore. The growth of the new nationalist spirit was influenced by the teachings of religious reformers like Swami Dayanand, Swami Vivekanand and social workers like Ranade who were to herald spiritual awakening and social reformation. The people of India, roused from their slumber, awakened to a pride in their ancient heritage and consciousness of their political rights. No longer were Indians content to remain slaves in bondage, intellectual or political.

Western educated Indians had formed political associations culminating in the birth of the Indian National Congress in 1885 to bring the grievances and the aspirations of the people to the attention of the British rulers, pledging loyalty and demanding a share in the administration. This petitioning did not make much headway yet they patiently and hopefully carried on. But the rising tide of the new defiant nationalism could not be rolled back. Tilak, Father of Indian Unrest appeared on the scene, a scholar patriot from the rugged soil

of Maharashtra. a born leader of men. The 'Kesari' and 'Mahratta' were to be the mouthpieces of his radical political views. While Congress politicians pleaded for concessions and a share in the administration, Tilak demanded for self government and to him self-government meant absolute sovereignty of the people. With his keen native shrewdness and ability to win over the people, he found suitable vehicles for enthusing the masses—the cult of Ganapati worship, of celebrations, and processions where voices were raised in public protest, and popularization of physical fitness and training in gymnasiums. In 1895 he gathered the patriotic and national forces around the figure of Shivaji, upholding this brave warrior as a symbol of unity and courage. He imbued people with self reliance, turning them away from the policy of fruitless appeals to the British to the realization that only a strong and self-reliant India would be able to achieve its own emancipation.

In 1896 there was an outbreak of plague in Bombay and Poona. The anti-plague measures caused widespread resentment and alarm and accusations were rife of atrocities committed and deliberate harassment under the cloak of plague control. Mr Rand, the Police Commissioner was considered specially tyrannical. 1897 was the Diamond Jubilee Year of Queen Victoria's reign. The government had decided to celebrate this auspicious occasion with full imperial grandeur despite the grinding famine and raging plague. This heartlessness so infuriated the Chapekar brothers that they shot dead Mr Rand and Lieut. Ayerst. These assassinations which had shattered the long spell of uneasy peace, proved a signal for an era of repression and terror. The Chapekar brothers were tried and executed, Tilak arrested and sentenced. The embers, smouldering since the Mutiny had caught fire again, the dormant volcano was about to erupt. The martyrdom of the Chapekar brothers marked a turning point in the history of India's freedom



movement – it was to usher in a tumultuous revolutionary period. Lord Curzon's repressive regime with measures like the Sedition Act, Official Secrets Act, and University Bill—hastened the process. He seemed determined to crush the Indian people into eternal subjugation. The crowning act of Curzon's reign of repression was to come in 1905, when Bengal was partitioned in the face of overwhelming opposition. Just as the excesses of the plague regime had roused the people of the Deccan under Tilak's leadership, the Partition of Bengal roused the people of that province under Surendra Nath Bannerji, Bepin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh. At this time an opportune psychological impetus was provided by the victory of Japan over Russia. It had destroyed the myth that Europeans were invincible.

The Congress at its annual meetings, continued to pass resolutions and put their demands – preceeded of course by pledges of loyalty to the benevolent British, demands which went unheeded. However it is only fair to admit that the labour of these well meaning pioneers was not all in vain—for public opinion was being formed and moulded, more and more Indians took interest in public affairs and the spirit of nationalism was spreading. However, new groups impatient for more speedy results were coming to the fore. Even within the Congress itself the Extremist movement had started. The Calcutta session of the Congress in 1906 was faced with the momentous choice—Naoroji or Tilak—Dadabhai Naoroji, Father of Reformist Party or Tilak, the towering young leader of the new nationalists. These new nationalists boldly demanded a campaign of Direct Action and Passive Resistance to compel the foreigners to abdicate their *Raj*.

What were the factors responsible for this change? Congress hopes of economic, political progress under British benevolence, had proved to be mere wishful thinking. Lord Curzon's



repressive measures had left educated Indians seething with bitterness, frustration and helplessness, while his crowning folly of partitioning Bengal hit both the educated and the masses alike and united them in opposition to British misrule. The agitation for reversal of partition—when cries of Swadeshi and Boycott rent the air, bonfires were made of foreign goods, and imprisonment courted—brought back into the Indian arena the violent spirit which had lain dormant since the Mutiny.

Swadeshi and Boycott held immense popular appeal. But when even these agitations could not quickly produce the desired results, impatient youths turned to terrorist methods. Secret societies and schools for promotion of physical culture sprang up, the name of Kali, Goddess of Strength was invoked, and an era of organized conspiracies of bombs, revolvers and dacoities had dawned on the Indian scene.

The Extremists or Nationalists and the Revolutionary terrorists shared a common aim but their methods differed. The former under the tutelage of leaders like Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, B.C. Pal, and Aurobindo Ghosh believed in political agitation, boycott of British goods and institutions and the cult of self-help and self-reliance. Acquainted with the histories of the French Revolution and Italian Renaissance and the American War of Independence, influenced by the Irish Seinn Fienne Movement and Russian Revolution they trusted in the efficacy of western revolutionary methods. Their defiant writings and speeches were to inculcate a new spirit of boldness and self-confidence in the hitherto emasculated Indian masses. The revolutionary terrorists under leaders like Barindra Kumar Ghosh and Bhupindra Nath Dutta aimed to overthrow the British Government by adopting violent means; leading upto an armed revolt when practicable.

This rapid growth of revolutionary activities called forth Draconian measures to contain it by way of Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act, Explosive Substances Act, Indian Criminal Law Amendment Act and the Press Act. But these Acts only succeeded in driving the revolutionary societies underground. Many revolutionaries escaped to foreign countries to carry on their activities more openly. Revolutionary centres had been set up in London and Paris by 1905. The ruthless suppression of dissent in India itself led to the establishment and proliferation of Anti British centres abroad in Europe and even in America. Highly inflammable journals and pamphlets preaching revolutionary ideas were smuggled into India from these centres abroad. The Indian Revolutionary movement was spreading its tentacles and widening the sphere of its activities and influence abroad—under the Herculean efforts of tireless inspired leaders like Shyamji, Savarkar, Madame Bhikhaiji Cama, Har Dayal, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya and others. Indian revolutionaries established international contacts and a network of world-wide organisations received encouragement and sympathy from Irish, Egyptian and Russian revolutionaries.

Dhananjay Keer mentions<sup>1</sup> : “So tense were the feelings and so grim was the fight that even the good hearted and God fearing Grand Old Man of India, Dadabhai Naoroji, was driven to despair and to the thought of revolt.” The year 1907 was in turmoil and tempo. A bomb was thrown in Muzaffarpur (Bihar) by Khudiram Bose. Intended for Kingsford, Chief Presidency Magistrate it inadvertently killed two British ladies, Mrs Kennedy and her daughter. Khudiram Bose, a youth of only 19 owned responsibility and faced the gallows fearlessly. Prafulla Chaki, his co-accused, killed himself while Narendra

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1. *Veer Savarkar*; p. 39

Gosain turned approver and divulged many important secrets. Soon however he too was silenced for good, shot in the hospital of Alipore Jail. His killers were hanged. Bengal mourned these brave youths.

This cult of the bomb shook British bureaucracy. This was indeed a dangerous trend. More bomb blasts, wrecking of trains and dacoities followed. Massive manhunts were mounted and indiscriminate arrests made in retaliation. Brave and brilliant editors were summarily sentenced (under Newspaper Act); Tilak was deported to Mandalay.

But such suppressive measures met with only limited success. Realizing belatedly that ruthless repression could defeat its own ends, the government announced the Morley-Minto Reforms. Though considered deceptive, disappointing and insulting by the London revolutionaries, they were undoubtedly a surrender to revolutionary agitation in India and abroad – Savarkar himself from London was to edge the Indian revolutionaries on, through the outpourings of his mighty pen. His avowed aim in writing his book on the Mutiny “to inspire his people with a desire to rise again and wage a second successful war for the liberation of their Motherland” seems to have made the British Government so apprehensive that they hurriedly proscribed the book which by their own admission had not yet been published.

All the writings and other activities and the foundings of societies, fellowships and of India House had not gone unnoticed in India. Tilak wrote to congratulate and hoped that the free atmosphere of England would give them a scope which they could never hope to get in India.

The revolutionaries abroad were in turn keeping a vigilant eye on happenings on the homeland aiding and abetting with propaganda and even with arms.



Though Shyamji advocated methods of strike and non-cooperation he could not ignore the trends in India. “What with the reign of terror that is now raging in India and what with the blood-thirsty laws, Indians are thrown upon themselves for the protection of their lives and properties as they have lost all faith in open and what is misnamed constitutional agitation. It seems that any agitation in India now must be carried on secretly and that the only methods which can bring the English Government to its senses are the Russian methods vigorously and constantly applied.”<sup>1</sup>

The dark omens on the Indian horizon were also noted by the ‘Gaelic American’ (a newspaper published in New York City by the Irish). “We can only say that should the Indian people at any time in the near future resort to what are spoken of as Russian methods in self-defence, we shall not be among those to blame them for it. The time comes when even the worm will turn and the sheep will stand at bay and according to the latest news from India that time is fast approaching.”

Among Englishmen there were some humanists and intellectuals who were aware of the damage done to India by their countrymen. Herbert Spencer and Congreve whom Shyamji was to quote often, Annie Besant and Sister Nivedita, A.O. Hume who started the Indian National Congress and C.F. Andrews, devoted companion of Gandhiji, the venerable socialist leader H.M. Hyndman who was to inspire and guide the revolutionaries of India House and a young Briton, Guy A. Aldred, printer of ‘Indian Sociologist’ the first Briton to be imprisoned for India’s cause—they fearlessly devoted themselves heart and soul to the cause of freedom of the land ruled and exploited by their own people.

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1. *Indian Sociologist*, December 1907.

It was H.M. Hyndman who had sponsored and fought for the inclusion of Madame Bhikhaiji Cama and Sardar Singhji Rana as delegates to the International Socialist Congress at Stuttgart and succeeded. He himself had prepared a paper for this conference on the 'Ruin of India by British Rule'<sup>1</sup> in which he was to expose in masterly fashion the conditions prevailing in India and to claim that India had a heritage, culture and civilization in no way inferior to that of the west. Pleading India's cause he had said, "The International Socialist Congress should thoroughly understand what has been done and how baneful the temporary success of the foreign despotism enforced by a set of islanders whose little starting point and headquarters lay thousands of miles away from their conquered possessions, has been to a population of at least 300 million people".

He explained how the conquest of India had been achieved:

"India was conquered for the Empire not by the English themselves but by Indians under the English and by taking advantages of Indian disputes".

Regarding the people of India he informed the international audience:

"If civilization is to be gauged by the standard in science, art, architecture, agriculture, industry, medicine, laws, philosophy and religion, then the state of India at that period was well worthy of comparison with the most enlightened and cultured parts of Europe and no European monarch could be reckoned in any way superior to Akbar, Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb or Shivaji; while it would be hard to name any European Minister of Finance equal to the Hindu Rajahs: Todar Mal and Nana Furnavistrs."

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1. Harindra Srivastava: *Five Stormy Years—Savarkar in London*, pp. 66-67

The era of Madame Cama was one of exciting and momentous events. Those were tumultuous days indeed, a turbulent period of India's history. Born only four years after the Mutiny, this firebrand young society lady was destined to be an eyewitness to the troubles and trials of her countrymen and to live through tempestuous years of exciting and stirring events which were to give full scope for her own idealistic rebellious nature and lead her to an involvement in her country's politics which was to bring her immortality.



## Mother of the Revolution

FROM HER noble role as a gentle Florence Nightingale serving suffering humanity during the plague epidemic in Bombay, to her reputation, within a few years of her stay abroad, as a firebrand militant Nationalist, the acknowledged 'Mother of the Revolution', was indeed a far cry.

Prof. Satyavrata Ghosh aptly describes this tremendous transformation :

From her upbringing Madame Cama was a peace-loving lady of the peace-loving Parsee community. But the environmental impact of her days was so great that she soon became the most active revolutionary woman of India and appropriately earned the epithet 'Mother of the Revolution'. The earlier liberal influence of Dadabhai Naoroji yielded place to a revolutionary ardour, an almost unparalleled mental metamorphosis. Her life that follows reads like a romantic story.<sup>1</sup>

The story starts with her arrival in England. Its beginning was innocuous enough. After medical treatment and a successful operation she regained her health and found lodgings as a paying guest with a respectable family in London's Holborn District. Happiness in a conventional marriage had eluded her. She was groping for direction, seeking an avenue for service, having known before the happiness of selfless work for a cause. At this juncture she came in contact with

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1. *Eve's Weekly*, December 2-8, 1978

Dadabhai Naoroji, a venerable man of her own community, the Grand Old Man of India. Eager to do something for her Motherland she enthusiastically aligned herself with his work on behalf of the Indian National Congress. Among the great men who shaped the life of this remarkable woman, Dadabhai Naoroji was the first. Her political aspirations received immense impetus from this association as she actively helped with his campaign, canvassing votes for his election to the British House of Commons. She became virtually his unofficial 'secretary'. With Naoroji's wide contacts this afforded her the opportunity of meeting many eminent Indians who later became legendary figures in their country's freedom struggle.

Her experiences in Bombay during the Plague of 1897, and the reign of repression and terror of the closing years of the century, had made her bitterly anti-British. The vision of independence and the defiant spirit of two valiant Indian freedom fighters, Lokmanya Tilak and Aurobindo Ghosh had deeply impressed and enthused her. Always an avid student of political history, she fell under the spell of the Italian Liberators, Mazzini and Garibaldi who were to prove the fount of inspiration for aspiring revolutionaries all over the world. Mazzini who strove to free Italy from the Austrian Yoke, and Garibaldi, who organized his people and united his nation, were to deeply influence her thoughts and actions. And as the horizons of her political vision began to expand, realization dawned on her about the implications of India's freedom struggle in the wider context of anti-imperialist struggles all over the world.

Instead of returning to India as she had originally planned she spent nearly a year each in several countries—Germany, Scotland, and France before settling down in London. These wanderings which enlarged her vision and contacts were to be a prelude and preparation for her subsequent political career.

Back in London she embarked on a crusading campaign for India's cause giving public speeches at Hyde Park, that traditional bastion of England's zealously guarded democratic right of freedom of speech—Hyde Park corner where 'soap-box orators' as they are called, expound on their favourite topic, speaking out freely and frankly, while people stroll about, gather in groups to listen, or move on disinterestedly and the orators often have to face 'heckling' from the crowds. Here Madame Cama could often be seen, young and stately holding the audience spellbound by her charges—and she never was one to mince words against the British; and recounting their misdeeds in India. Hearing such fiery oratory from a woman of a subject nation, many were stunned, their concepts of 'native' women, meek, mild and submissive and 'in purdah', were rudely shaken.

All through this period she had kept in close touch with Dadabhai Naoroji and her letters<sup>1</sup> to him reveal her concern for his work and welfare.

C/o Mrs Rana,  
46, Rue Blanche, Paris

My dear Dadabhoy,

I see from today's mail's Bombay newspaper that your grand-daughters have come to London by this mail. Now, I shall feel so much obliged to you if you kindly arrange for me to stay in the same house with them.

I will pay whatever you arrange for me, but it will be so very convenient to be together, so that we can go about and work well.

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1. All her letters are with the National Archives, Delhi, under The Home Dept. (Political) Files.



I can come down to be with you on New Year's day as Mr Owen writes that you open the election campaign on that day.

My difficulty is for getting a room somewhere near North Lambeth and if you can arrange to put me up with your grand-daughters and engage a room for me in the same house, then I will start from London by 28th.

Waiting for your reply and wishing you all good wishes of the season.

I remain,

Saturday, 25-12-1905

Sincerely yours,  
Bhikhaiji Rustom Cama

In another letter dated January 27, 1906 from D.P. Cama's place in London she writes:

I see from the newspapers that the Irish have secured 84 seats in the House. Now I wonder if they are discussing in any way, of resigning one out of the 84 in your favour. What magnanimity they could show when there is an opportunity and how joyfully for India.

Two letters were written early in 1906 by Bhikhaiji to Dadabhai Naoroji. In the first letter dated January 30, 1906 she suggests that Dadabhai Naoroji try for a seat in the British Parliament. In the second letter she writes, "You can command my services." and continues

"I feel so much disappointed at the reply you have got from the Irish party. I hear that your agent Mr Owen is gone to Ireland. Do let me know, if you think my joining him there would help him to get over the 'no'. Just treat me as your own daughter and tell me if you

would like to try it and I can start tomorrow if it brings some real good end.

Some people are saying that there ought to be held meetings all over India and then they should send telegrams to Mr Redmond and others begging for a seat for you. What is your opinion? Do you think one can write to friends like Phirozeshah Mehta and Dinsha Wacha in private letters making this suggestion?"

And on February 25, 1906 :

Au Revoir! I am leaving for Paris on Thursday the 1st March as my two months return ticket expires on that day. I need not say again that you can always command my services, whenever there is an occasion for it and you may drop me a line: C/o Henry S. King & Co., 65, Cornhill London".

The following letter of February 11, 1906 shows how actively she was involved with Dadabhai Naoroji's election work:

44 St Marks Road,  
North Kensington  
February 11,

My Dear Dadabhoy,

Excuse me for not sending you the names of youngmen who were working at canvassing for you and whom you want to send votes of thanks.

I was laid up with a rather bad cold since last Sunday, besides I wanted to see if some friends may come here today and give me some more names. I am thankful to say that I have got over the cold and feeling very well again and going to Torquay for a week with Mrs Dorabji Cama.

I enclose herewith a few names. I met some Hindoos also, working at canvassing. But I am sorry, I did not know their names and address.

Hoping you are well.

With kind regards in which Mr & Mrs Dorabji join,

Yours sincerely,  
Bhikhaiji Rustom Cama

It was Dadabhai Naoroji who introduced her to Sardar Singh Rana then studying in the Inner Temple of the Inns of Court. Through him she met Shyamji Krishna Varma and came under his influence. If Dadabhai Naoroji encouraged her as a companion in his political campaigns, it was Shyamji and later the fiery Savarkar who brought pragmatic direction into her life. Madame Cama seemed to wake into a new larger life of constant activity and dedicated purpose, all her energies absorbed in the thrilling mission of fighting for her country's freedom. She became a regular writer and contributor to his publication the 'Indian Sociologist' and an active member of the Home Rule Society and the India House founded by him. The foundation stone of the Revolutionary Party in England had already been laid by patriots like Shyamji but it was left to Madame Cama and Savarkar to raise it brick by brick into a mighty edifice. Bhikhaiji's contact with this early revolutionary work through Shyamji, her realization that the Congress policy of petitioning was making no headway and her own impatient nature turned her away from the constitutional agitation and methods of Dadabhai Naoroji. And Bhikhaiji the militant nationalist was born. She was destined to be in the forefront of this new militant movement in the most critical years of the great awakening (1905-1914) and to carry on her unceasing propaganda for India's freedom from London, Paris and Geneva that was to echo round the world.



Against the backdrop of continuous turbulence in India, the violence generated after the Plague, and Partition of Bengal, when fiery writings and speeches and the cries of Swaraj and *Swadeshi* rent the air, Shyamji Varma launched in 1905 the 'Indian Sociologist' in London. Herbert Spencer's words, "Resistance to tyranny is not simply justifiable, but imperative" was its *lief motif*. Shyamji explained the aim of this publication, "The Political relations between England and India urgently require a genuine Indian interpreter in the U.K. to show, on behalf of India, how Indians really fare under British rule." He followed this up by establishing a radical organisation of Indians in London 'The Indian Home Rule Society'.

By the end of the 19th century there existed in London a British Committee of the Indian National Congress but it was generally ineffective. It was the radical leader Hyndman, himself an Englishman, who was to point out forcibly the futility of Congress leaders' appeals to British Public opinion and thus provide the catalyst for the first coming together of the Indian revolutionaries abroad.

Undoubtedly and to the credit of the British, it was their tradition of liberty and democratic rights and the free atmosphere of England that could permit these revolutionary protests against the British empire in the capital city of that Empire itself. Tilak had alluded to this in his congratulatory telegram<sup>1</sup> applauding Shyamji's 'self sacrificing spirit' and had said, "The freer atmosphere of England would give him a wider scope for the propagation of the nationalist ideas among the Indian people."

On July 1, 1905, India House was inaugurated in the presence of a large and interesting gathering of English and Indian ladies and gentlemen. Present on this memorable occasion

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1. Letters of Lokmanya Tilak (edited by M.D. Vidwans)

were Mr Hyndman (Social Democratic Federation), Mr Swinny (Prositivist Society), Mr Quelch (Editor of 'Justice') Madame Despard (Irish Republican), Dadabhai Naoroji, Lajpat Rai, Madame Cama, Mr Hans Raja and many students. Shyamji began the proceedings with a reference to the revered Dadabhai Naoroji who was among the audience! "It gives me much pleasure to see my veteran friend Dadabhai Naoroji, who, though tied down as he is by certain political views, has the catholicity and generosity of mind to give us encouragement by his presence here this afternoon."

It was left to Hyndman to declare open India House and to make the speech of the evening, a memorable and historic speech. He said, "As things stand loyalty to Great Britain means treachery to India. I have met many Indians and the loyalty to British rule which the majority have professed has been disgusting. Either they were insincere or they were ignorant. But of late, I rejoice to see that a new spirit has manifested. Thus there are men and women here this afternoon, from all parts of India and of very different origins and schools of thought. But the ideal of final emancipation is the same for all." He warned the audience, "From England itself, there is nothing to be hoped for" and went on to say, "It is the immoderate men, the determined men, the fanatical men who will work out the salvation of India by herself". He then referred to the event of the evening. "The institution of this India House means a great step in that direction of Indian growth and Indian emancipation, and some of us who are here this afternoon, may live to witness the first fruits of its triumphant success."<sup>1</sup>

Little did Hyndman dream how truly prophetic his words were to prove within the next few years. And in the audience that day among the few 'immoderate', 'determined',

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1. Indulal Yajnik: *Shyamji Krishnavarma; Life and Times of an Indian Revolutionary*, p. 142



‘fanatical’, people needed for India’s salvation was one such immoderate, determined and fanatical woman—Bhikhaiji Cama.

For a correct comprehension of Madame Cama’s London days, it is imperative to know the atmosphere and the surroundings she worked in, the people she associated with, the speeches she gave, the fiery articles and letters she wrote, the societies and activities she organised and participated in. Most of her early activities were to centre around India House.

What was it like, this notorious India House in London which was to be dubbed ‘the House of Mystery’ and ‘The House of Terror’ by British Intelligence and earn intriguing nicknames like ‘The Beehive’ and the ‘den’ and the dynamic group working there branded ‘The Devil and his dirty dozen’ by British detective? Situated at 65, Cromwell Avenue on the corner of Cromwell Terrace, near Hampstead Heath, Highgate, London N, it was a high three storeyed mansion surrounded with tall ash trees, thick shrubs and a low wall. Its colour was biscuit brown—poetically described by Savarkar as a blend of revolutionary red and the rising sun. It could provide boarding and lodging facilities for about 25-30 persons, the food served being traditionally Indian. This house with its rather brooding and mysterious look and anti-British atmosphere had the facilities of a Lecture Hall, Library and recreation rooms. Ostensibly meant for the innocuous purpose of providing reasonable and cheap accomodation—the rates being only Rs 16 per week to Indian students, it was destined to become the headquarters of the Indian Revolutionary Movement in England, perhaps the most feared Indian organization outside India.

Madame Cama herself did not reside there but she was an almost constant visitor. On the weekly meetings followed by dinner and discussions and Savarkar’s masterly expositions, the Lecture Hall would be full to overflowing. These dedicated idealists whom the British colonialists were to brand and



denounce as, ‘assassins’, ‘anarchists’ and ‘terrorists’ were national minded revolutionary patriots. Madame Cama identified herself with this militant Nationalism and her co—workers were dynamic men both in and outside India House—men like S. R. Rana, Har Dayal, Senapati Bapat, Permanand, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, M.P.T. Acharya and others. She had found with them a common identity of high purpose and friendship flowered into true companionship. Even though Gandhiji described India House and its inmates as ‘extremists’ and ‘a party of violence’ he found them ‘earnest spirits possessing a high degree of morality, great intellectual ability and lofty self-sacrifices.’<sup>1</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru has been criticized for keeping away from such political activities in his student days, but he was not completely indifferent to them when in England. He recounts in his Autobiography about nationalist activities that “they stirred all of us Indians in England. Almost without exception we were Tilakists or Extremists.”

Madame Cama had plunged whole-heartedly into political life, moving from place to place with unexampled vigour and drive, though no longer young and often in indifferent health. She continued her ceaseless activities in the revolutionary cause from both London and Paris, firstly with Shyamji, later with Savarkar. They held weekly meetings and speeches and had daily discussions. The work included writing, printing, packing and posting thousands of revolutionary pamphlets and booklets addressed to hundreds of different addresses to evade detection. Later she even helped in the procuring and despatch of arms and weapons and securing help for training in the use of these and of explosives.

With her undoubted organizational abilities she combined

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1. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, (Publications Division) Vol. IX, p. 508

the rare gift of inspiring others to action. Her passionate, yet frank lucid analysis of the ills besetting her beloved country instilled the revolutionary youth with direction and purpose. India House gave her full scope for these talents, it was here that the cream of Indian students coming abroad for education were being inculcated with the tenets of revolution and transformed into patriots and martyrs. And in her case, example was better than precept—she herself had willingly sacrificed so much. Later she rendered practical aid to the revolutionaries, help for their training and for procuring arms. She spent freely of her own resources of money and energy for building up a revolutionary movement in India. Most revolutionaries of Europe had met her and were impressed and inspired by her.

The founder of India House, the political propagandist Shyamji, a distinguished Sanskrit scholar, revered Herbert Spencer as his political mentor. He believed that Indians could throw off the foreign yoke by simply and completely refusing to help or serve their English masters and without the evils of a bloody revolution and that the salvation of India depended on Indians themselves. He had founded Herbert Spencer fellowship to enable brilliant Indian students to complete their education in England but, on the strict condition that they would not thereafter accept any office under the British, thereby recruiting able young people for the revolutionary cause. Later, realizing the ruthless suppression in India, even Shyamji was to change his tune and write in the 'Indian Sociologist' of December 1907, "The only effective way which could bring the British Government to its senses were Russian methods vigorously employed." But he continued to be vacillating in his views.

Besides Shyamji, some of the notable people of Madame Cama's immediate group were Har Dayal, a brilliant scholar who had shaken academic and political circles of England by



surrendering his scholarship in his nation's cause; M.T.P. Acharya, a Tamil scholar, journalist and patriot; Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, gifted brother of Sarojini Naidu who spurned the many avenues his talents laid open before him and preferred political exile in the revolutionary cause, worked in Russia, destined never to return to his beloved Motherland. And there was Sardar Singh Rana, of a princely Rajput family of Kathiawar called to the Bar in London, who later had a jewellery business and was known as 'the Pearl Prince' and who was closest to Madame Cama and made generous contributions to the cause. And of course, Savarkar, the most brilliant and inspired of them all, the undisputed leader in the English circle.

With the debut of Savarkar as its fiery leader, activities at India House were intensified. His 'Free India Society' was modelled on Mazzini's 'Young Italy' with the radical Abhinav Bharat as its inner circle. Regular meetings were organised, Indian festivals and birth and death anniversaries of Indian patriots celebrated, and discussions of Indian political problems took place. In all these activities Madame Cama had a prominent role. India House was a place of constant comings and goings and thinkers, revolutionaries, students and ordinary mortals passed through its portals. Her receptive mind responded to the thrill of clandestine and important happenings. There was endless activity, challenges had to be faced and met, and the dream of freedom kept alive, cherished and nourished.

Savarkar, undisputed leader of India House, possessed courage and vision, combined with incisive intellect and a formidable will. He believed in the efficacy of secret societies and clandestine organisations. Under him the theoretical radicalism of Shyamji gave place to the cult of violent sedition and militant action. 'To inspire people with a burning desire to



rise again and wage a second successful war to liberate their Motherland.' Savarkar wrote his 'First War of Indian Independence' destined to become a textbook for future generations of Indian revolutionaries, and to create a unique record as a book so feared that it was proscribed even before it was actually printed. Madame Cama with the help of Acharya translated this entire book into French for its second edition—a mammoth task indeed!

Savarkar could foresee the impact of vital forces in International Politics and realizing that conditions in England were not really congenial to India's cause, concentrated on foreign propaganda to enlist sympathy outside the U.K. Congress moderates were still appealing to the finer sensibilities of the 'good Englishmen' without success. Savarkar and Madame Cama had realized that these 'good' and sympathetic Englishmen constituted only a few supporters of the Indian cause on the periphery of British Politics and connected to international movements. They aimed therefore at the sympathy and help of the radical press all over the world. Irish agitators and the 'Gaelic American' published from New York, willingly lent support. Savarkar and Madame Cama wrote vigorous political articles which were then translated into German, French, Italian, Russian and Portuguese for world wide distribution. The extent, the impact and importance of this international propaganda was not fully realized by either the Indians or the British until the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

Savarkar's aim was to organize a united anti-British front with a view of rising in revolt simultaneously, at an opportune time, against the British Empire. For that revolt, preparations were to be made, so arms smuggling and collecting went on. Planning was to be carried on so as not to miss the golden opportunity of a war in Europe which Savarkar could foresee.

Savarkar combined the talents of both propagandist and organizer, believing not only in words but in action. So while his fertile mind was always devising new plans and thinking out new methods, physically he kept busy writing, printing, packing and posting explosive and inflammable literature. He often appeared with stains of putric acid on his hands. All the co-operation and assurances of help received from revolutionaries of other countries would be of no avail unless the Indian revolutionaries themselves knew how to fight and use weapons. There was no place in London for such training as rifle shooting clubs rejected them because they were Indians. They finally discovered a 'range' in a deserted place of a London suburb and started target practice with revolvers. Pistols were deviously smuggled into India through book covers and these 'books' through false bottoms of boxes. The atmosphere of India House was one of heroic pride. Senapati Bapat and Hem Chandra Das were sent to study bomb making. A Russian engineer gave Bapat a bomb manual in the Russian language. The resourceful Bapat managed to get it translated into English by a Russian girl Miss Annya, a medical student in Berlin. Immediately Bapat, Hoti Lal Varma of Aligarh and Hem Chandra Das left for India with numerous cyclostyled copies of the bomb manual.

The decisive Madame Cama was very clear in her mind as regards both her aims and her methods. She was convinced now that revolutionary methods alone could achieve India's freedom. She still pointed out that Indians were and had always been peace loving people but the condition of her people left her in no doubt about the methods she should adopt to achieve freedom. As a result of her contacts with continental and Russian revolutionaries, this feeling grew stronger and firmer. Her passion for freedom was so intense that violent revolutionary methods appeared natural to her. In her writings she drew vivid pictures, of British misrule, the pathetic



plight of her people and the need for a violent uprising. All attempts to prevent the entry of this fiery literature by interception at Customs proved futile. Not to be disheartened or defeated she found other means of smuggling in this potent propaganda through Pondicherry. Whatever Madame Cama attempted she did with unusual thoroughness and courage. When she accepted resort to violence as an inevitable and inescapable method she organized the actual training of young revolutionaries in the use of arms and the manufacture of bombs. Even at Stuttgart not content with her historic speech she resorted to the action of the actual raising of the flag. She was to become the moving spirit behind Abhinav Bharat and the activities of Indians in Europe. These young people had a clear idea of their goal. They declared, and Madame Cama was to repeat often that India will be independent; India will be a Republic; Hindi the National Language; Devanagari the National Script.

India House had adopted Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's 'Bande Mataram' (Hail Motherland) as the National Hymn. The stirring strains of this song were frequently heard through the Halls of India House and invariably used at the opening of every meeting and conference. "The two words became the shibboleth of the extremists and were used in greeting and salute in much the same way the Nazis used 'Heil Hitler'.<sup>1</sup>

Madame Cama attached great importance to these words. Stories of Bande Mataram printed on her sarees and displayed all over her room are undoubtedly exaggerated as she was too refined a person for such exhibitionism. There is no doubt that these words so precious to the revolutionaries were for Madame Cama not only embroidered on her flag, they were engraved on her heart.

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1. *Emily C. Brown: Har Dayal, p. 62*



The oath taken by members of Abhinav Bharat pledging themselves “to fight under its revolutionary banner against the British tyrants even up to death or victory” used to be in the name of the Motherland, and the inspiring verse which all the inmates of India House would collectively repeat every night as their bedtime prayer was:

*Ek Dev; Ek Desh; Ek Bhasha*  
*Ek Jath; Ek Jeev; Ek Asha.*  
(One God, one Nation, one language,  
one race, one form, one hope).

Yes, the atmosphere was ‘stirring’ but there were lighter moments too. India House inmates talked in many different Indian languages—a literal babble of tongues. Scotland Yard was often puzzled and baffled by this. So they planted their agent Kirtikar, who joined India House in the guise of being a dental student. Suspicions were aroused, specially when it was discovered that he had hardly ever attended his dental classes, so the revolutionaries broke into his room and discovered records of his reports to Scotland Yard. They threatened Kirtikar and extracted confession of his spying activities. As a clever ruse, he was allowed to continue sending his reports but after Savarkar had seen and monitored them. It became a game of shadowing the shadows and the unsuspecting Scotland Yard was fed only the information the revolutionaries wanted it to know.

In his June 1907 issue of the ‘Indian Sociologist’, Shyamji had devoted 3 columns to “the unjust and high-handed action of the British” in deporting Lala Lajpat Rai and had said that it portended the “downfall of British rule in India.” “The example of sacrifice and devotion set to their countrymen by Lajpat Rai and others is producing the desired effect among Indians of all shades of opinion who are rapidly

becoming cognisant of the great truth proclaimed by Wendell Phillips that every step of progress which the world has taken has been from scaffold to scaffold and from stake to stake.”

More important than his own comments however, was the letter he published from Madame Cama, by now the undisputed leader of the Nationalists in Paris and often called ‘Mother of the Indian Revolution’. The Indian community in Paris had convened an urgent meeting at which Madame Cama made a moving and eloquent appeal to her countrymen which was later reproduced in the ‘Indian Sociologist’ (June 1907), as an open letter to the people of India. She said:

“I was shocked to hear that one of us Mr Lajpat Rai, a true patriot, was snatched away from his hearth and home and became a prisoner. Men and women of India resent this atrocity. Make up your mind that the whole population should rather perish than live in such slavery.

“What is the good of talking about the glorious past of India, Persia, and Arabia”, she admonished them, “If you are living in slavery today? Brave Rajputs, Sikhs, Pathans, Gorkhas, patriotic Marathas and Bengalis, energetic Parsees and courageous Muslims and last, but not the least, you mild Jains, patient Hindu children of great and mighty races, why are you not living according to your traditions? What is it that makes you live in subjection? Come out and establish liberty and equality under Swaraj.”

She appealed to her ‘Brothers and sisters’ to fight out the battle of human right and show to the world that East can teach the West.... Teach this to the Englishmen who are styled ‘savages in broadcloth’ by William Wordsworth, grand son of the great poet.... I wish I could break open the very prison doors and bring out Lajpat Rai... Lajpat the patriot,



should not be left to breathe the foul air of captivity. For he who loses his liberty loses his virtue.”

And she made this eloquent appeal to the youth: “Youth of India, you stand between the past and future, work up the cause for the principles, though it may be our destiny not reach the promised land, but only to hail it in dying from afar off. Remember, Freedom is a conquest and never a Bequest.... We cannot help feeling for these brave men who have put their all, their very life, on the altar of the Motherland.”

She pointed out that in Unity lay strength, “Let as combine. If we all speak bravely, like Lajpat Rai how many forts and prisons must the Government build before it can deport or confine us all: we are 300 million strong. If Hindus, Muslims, Parsees, Christians would realize that they were as much Indians as Lajpat Rai, this would provide the unity we require.” She continued, “Let us all make his cause and his sufferings our own.” She then articulated the policy of Non-Cooperation. “Friends, show self-respect and stop the whole despotic administration by refusing to work for it in any capacity. Sever all connections with it. Tender resignation by thousands everyday.”

Both the ideas of flooding the jails and non-cooperation were later to be espoused by Gandhiji and became key concepts in his programmes. He also emphasized the need for unity and concerted action. It was in November 1917 he said that he realized “the only true resistance to the Government. . . was to cease to cooperate with it” (Autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 590). ‘The Mother of the Revolution’ had shown ten years earlier, the path for our ‘Father of the Nation’ to follow.

Among Shyamji’s many sins of sedition, this was the ultimate. He had published in the ‘Indian Sociologist’ a



translation of La Marseilles, besides Madame Cama's stirring speech, The storm burst. The British India Office and Scotland Yard were busy tightening the noose around him. His correspondence was censored, the printing press and office of the 'Indian Sociologist' raided. He was at the crucial crossroad of his life. Three alternatives faced him – surrender, and shameful submission, imprisonment, or escape and asylum in another country. Too proud to surrender and realizing the futility of meaningless martyrdom he made a swift exit from England, the country "which affords a safe asylum to the oppressed of all countries save India". His explanation of his leaving was:

There is saying in Sanskrit that it is better not to put your foot in the mud at all than to put it in and wash it. In other words it is folly for a man to allow himself to be arrested by an unsympathetic government and thus be deprived of action when by anticipating matters he can avoid such an event.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps similar reasoning had led Madame Cama to leave England and settle in Paris some time before. She had since become the focal point of nationalist activities in Paris and even on the Continent. She was holding the Paris front as unflinchingly as Shyamji and Savarkar the London one. But she was frequently in London and at their side at all important meetings, conferences and celebrations.

In the Confidential Report of the British Government 'Political Trouble in India 1907-1917' Madame Cama figures very prominently. This report records that on November 24, 1908 she attended one of the India House meetings in London in which she advised the hearers "to follow the self-sacrificing

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1. Indulal Yajnik: *Shyamji Krishnavarma; Life and Times of an Indian Revolutionary*, p. 228

example of the political assassins of Bengal”, whom she named, each name being greeted by cheers and “to be prepared for death”. She displayed a flag woven in silk and gold, with the inscription ‘In memory of the Martyrs of 1908’.

In honour of the 51st Anniversary of the Mutiny and to mark the completion of Savarkar’s book ‘Indian War of Independence’, India House staged an elaborate celebration. The event received full coverage in ‘The Times’ which even reproduced the invitation and the programme. The invitation had been deliberately printed in red ink, a fact, in itself considered ominous. The observance was a curious mixture of modern-day public relations ‘gimmicks’ and traditional Hindu practices. Tributes were made to the ‘sacred memory’ of heroes and heroines of the Mutiny: Emperor Bahadur Shah, Shrimant Nana Saheb, Rani Lakshmibai, Maolvi Ahmad Shah, Raja Kuvar Kunwar Singh and other ‘martyrs’. The tributes were followed by declarations of self-denial involving a vow to abjure ‘all pleasures and pastimes’ and to contribute the money saved to a fund for the Heroes and Martyrs of 1857.<sup>1</sup> More than a hundred students were present. The meeting lasted four hours and ended with the distribution of *prashad*, a ritual offering, this time chappaties.

Savarkar had created a ‘blast’ in London not through a bomb but through a 4 page leaflet ‘O’ martyrs’<sup>2</sup> read out at this meeting and then circulated far and wide.

“The battle for freedom once begun  
And handed down from sire to son  
Though often lost is ever won.”

Beginning with this inspiring quotation, the leaflet proceeds:

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1. Emily C. Brown: *Har Dayal*, pp.63-64

2. Harindra Srivastava: *Five Stormy Years. Savarkar in London*, (June 1906 to June 1911) pp. 87-90

Today is the 10th of May. It was on this day that, in the ever memorable year 1857, the first campaign of the War of Independence was opened by you, O' Martyrs, on the battle-fields of India. The Motherland, awakened to the sense of her degrading slavery unsheathed her sword, burst forth the shackles and struck the first blow for her liberty and her honour....

All honour be to you, O' Martyrs; for it was for the preservation of the honour of the race that you performed the fiery ordeal of a revolution....

We take up your cry, we revere your flag, we are determined to continue that fiery mission of "away with the foreigner",.. for the war of 1857 shall not cease till the revolution arrives, striking slavery into dust, elevating liberty to the throne. Whenever a people rises for its freedom there never can be an end to such a war as this. No, revolutionary war knows no truce save liberty or death. We, inspired by your memory, determine to continue the struggle you began in 1857.... Shall the world say that India has accepted the defeat as the final one? That the blood of 1857 was shed in vain? .... No, by Hindustan, No... The war begun on the 10th of May 1857 is not over on the 10th of May 1908, nor shall it ever cease till a 10th of May to come sees the destiny accomplished, sees the beautiful India crowned, either with the lustre of victory or with the halo of Martyrdom... Whisper, then, into us by what magic you caught the secret of Union.....

Fifty years are past, but O' restless hearts, we promise you with our heart's blood that your Diamond Jubilee shall not pass without seeing your wishes fulfilled.... Your blood, O' Martyrs, shall be avenged."



In December 1908, when, the Indian National Conference was held at Caxton Hall an effective orator was Madame Bhikhaiji Cama who spoke on the 'boycott' resolution. Then the chief resolution demanding Swaraj' was moved. Savarkar defined and explained the concept of Swaraj, as 'absolute political independence for India'. At the end he said, "Knowing this full well, you are voting for the Resolution. Before passing the Resolution just bring before your mind's eye the dreadful prison walls, the dreary dingy cells". The Resolution was passed unanimously. (It was as if like a prophet, for himself at least, Savarkar had forseen the Andaman jail and its cells). Another resolution was passed expressing doubts about the forthcoming reforms. They were considered deceptive, disappointing and insulting in as much as they "will forment communal tensions in India" nevertheless later the extremists were to take the credit for the reforms being announced at all.

On December 29, another historic meeting took place at Caxton Hall, Westminster, to celebrate the birth anniversary of Guru Govind Singh, a great prophet, poet and warrior of India. Savarkar spoke of Guru Govind Singh's bold resistance to alien domination and held it up as an example to follow. A monumental Souvenir of the occasion is a group photo taken on 'Guru Parva' preserved in the British museum newspaper library. It shows among others, Bepin Chandra Pal, the Chairman in the centre, Madame Cama to his left and Lajpat Rai to her left. What deserves special attention is the Turban (symbol of respect for Sikhs) worn by all, Sikhs and non Sikhs alike. In the background is a big banner with the legend 'Sat Shri Akal', two flags, one of the Sikhs and the other of Indian freedom (with 8 stars as 8 States, the sun for Hindus, the moon for Muslims) can be seen fluttering on the left and the right side of the dias respectively.

Thus ended the year on a historic note of national unity of all states and communities to overthrow the unholy aliens from the holy Motherland.

This note of national solidarity and unity and communal harmony was next to Indian Independence, the thing dearest to the heart of Bhikhaiji Cama, the 'Mother of the Revolution'.

Shyamji had continued his 'Indian Sociologist' from London. He still kept harking back to peaceful means and boycott and contended himself with laying down abstract laws, while the others prepared for action. His vacillating opinions on martyrs, specially on Dhingra were to anger and alienate his friends. Savarkar and Madame Cama had moved far away from the purely theoretical radicalism of Shyamji. They concentrated their heart and soul and life to waging a war of Indian Independence. There was no hesitation in their strong words but they were intent more on flaming actions than in inflaming words. After India House had to close down, Shyamji did not purchase another property or establishment for India House from the proceeds—his caution, self-conceit and now this petty-mindedness in money matters repelled and antagonized his colleagues.

Devoted friends and trusted co-workers like Madame Cama and Rana had by now gathered round themselves enthusiastic groups of young Indians in Paris and London who had been disillusioned by what was considered the 'mock-heroics' of their erstwhile idol. They realized the urgent necessity of crystalizing and consolidating all the best elements of the Indian Nationalist Movement under the banner of a truly revolutionary newspaper which would reflect a vigorous revolutionary policy. They found a brilliant editor of literary ability and deep conviction in Har Dayal. Madame Cama and Har Dayal started 'Bande Mataram' in September 1909. They issued this journal with the object of continuing and



commemorating the good work and to perpetuate the name of the paper founded by Bepin Chandra Pal and later edited by Aurobindo Ghosh—the redoubtable and effective champion of Indian Freedom—‘Bande Mataram’ of Calcutta. This paper had been forced to cease publication under the Newspapers Act of 1908. No support was sought or required by Madame Cama and Har Dayal from Spencer’s ethics or Congreve’s declaration. This newspaper was unhesitatingly outspoken, hit straight from the shoulder and called for a new war against the British Raj in India.

Later came ‘Talvar’ with Chattopadhyaya as editor, printed in Holland. It openly advocated physical force both individually and collectively against British rule and its Indian and English henchmen. ‘Talvar’ like ‘Bande Mataram’ was also promoted by Madame Cama.

The Government of India and India Office were powerless to suppress the revolutionary activities in England, though they desperately tried by all means to prevent the entry of revolutionary material into India. Even the ‘Indian Sociologist’ was banned but smuggled in. Arms were despatched by the revolutionaries. Military training was started for revolutionaries along with instructions on the manufacture of bombs and literature was distributed even among soldiers to create discontent. Even the methods of suppression used in India like the banning of newspapers, arrests of editors, the prohibition of public speeches and political meetings failed to stem the tide of national resurgence.

Lord Minto, time and again impressed on Morley the effect of the propaganda from abroad. He told him it was needless to dilate the amount of harm which the seditious literature from abroad was doing in India. He mentioned the steps the Government of India had taken to prevent its introduction into



the country but pleaded that his initiative alone could not put an end to this evil.

When Jackson was shot dead with a Browning pistol, Mr C. Amin turned approver and accused Savarkar. The British police tried to involve Rana and even Shyamji. Madame Cama took the unprecedented step of making a signed declaration at the British Consulate in Paris to take the entire responsibility on her own shoulders. Truly a worthy Mother of the Revolution and the Revolutionaries!

Even after the removal of Savarkar from the scene Madame Cama and the other revolutionaries did not give up. Swaraj they knew could never be attained except by waging a bloody and relentless war against the British, with this end in view they expanded the scope of their activities and established their centres in Berlin, New York and Tokyo, apart from Paris.

Living in France, Madame Cama could as well be called the Indian Joan of Arc. In France, however, the Indian community regarded her as a reincarnation of a diety, presumably Kali. To her the British were tyrants who sucked the blood of Mother India till her body became a bag of bones. She lectured, wrote and circulated revolutionary literature inspiring Indians to join the freedom struggle. She published 'Bande Mataram' which had unrestricted entry into U.S.A. Her raising the flag and her thunderous speech bear evidence to her unparalleled patriotism.

The saga of the revolutionaries' heroic struggle was not confined to the boundaries of India alone. Many revolutionaries lived and worked abroad. Madame Cama was one of those outstanding revolutionaries in Europe, regarded as the high priestess of Indian Nationalism.

Among the galaxy of gallant revolutionaries this lone woman stood out—sharing their work and burdens, trials and triumphs, guiding and inspiring the younger revolutionaries, enlisting more recruits to the cause, inspiring and encouraging the revolutionaries in India also with her immortal words which she smuggled out to them, along with the arms they needed for the struggle, not forgetting the monetary aid she also rendered, all the while keeping a motherly ‘eye’ on her ‘boys’ and their welfare.

And this was the woman who herself had given up hearth and home and the comforts and security of a rich family, roamed through the length and breadth of Europe and even America, inspite of weak health and gathering years, canvassing support. She defied the might of an Empire and unfurled India’s first National Flag at an International forum – the flag that was to inspire countless revolutionaries and freedom fighters. No wonder all those who knew and worked with her revered her as ‘The Mother of the Revolution’.

The ideals and creed of the revolutionaries have been beautifully described in immortal words in ‘Bande Mataram’—‘A Message to the People of India’, 1908, (a leaflet) from the Mother of the Revolution herself.

The opening paragraphs convey her love and concern for her Motherland:

Countrymen! lend me your ears, I will not take up your long time; only five minutes. I fully understand the responsibility of what I say. I have come prepared for everything. I have but one life to give one *Avtar* to sacrifice. I want to speak on Methods, as I cannot keep quiet, since such tyranny is going on in our country, and so many deportations are cabled everyday, and all peaceful means are denied to us.

“I have neither power, not the authority to recommend this or that course to our patriotic countrymen. People who suffer in that land are the best judges of the methods to adopt. However, I speak the truth and I know when I say that the recent events in India will not affect the forward movement in the least. Are our people afraid? No! No! The new Regulations are perhaps a little worse than the old ones. They may be quicker in action but they cannot be more unjust in fact.

She then explains the recourse to violence:

Some of you say that as a woman I should object to violence. Well, Sirs, I had that feeling at one time. Three years ago it was repugnant to me even to talk of violence as a subject of discussion, but owing to the heartlessness, the hypocrisy, the rescality of the Liberals, that feeling is gone. Why should we deplore the use of violence when our enemies drive us to it? If we use force, it is because we are forced to use force. How is it that the Russian Sophy Perovskai and her comrades are heroines and heroes in the sight of Englishmen and Englishwomen while our countrymen are considered criminals for doing exactly the same thing for the same cause? If violence is applauded in Russia, why not in India? Tyranny is Tyranny and torture is torture wherever applied. Success justifies any action. Struggle for freedom calls for exceptional measures. Successful rebellion against the foreign rule is patriotism. What is life without Freedom? What is Existence without Principles? Friends, let us put aside all hinderances, doubts, and fears. In Mazzini's words I appeal to you. “Let us stop arguing with people who know our arguments by heart and do not heed them. If our people appear degraded, it is an added reason to endeavour at all risks to make



them better". Show selfrespect, Indians, and set to work. The days for calling meetings and passing resolutions are now over. Do silent but solid work. A handful of foreigners, a few Englishmen, have declared war on us. Who can wonder if we millions accept challenge and declare war on them? The price of Liberty must be paid. Which nation has got it without paying for it? Thank God that our people have learnt that it is sin to tolerate despotism. They have learnt to combat without pause; they have learnt rather to die fearless than perish like worms. We are awakened to the sense of our power, and in the name of our ancestors and our glorious country, we defy our oppressors.

The lives of four young men who are done to death, are burnt away just like incense on the altar of Motherland. *Bande Mataram!* On the alter of truth, justice and liberty, these noble lives are sacrificed. This flag of *Bande Mataram* which I wave before you, was made for me by a noble selfless young patriot who is standing at the bar of the so called court of justice in our country. What a mockery to talk of justice and jury! We have seen such a travesty of justice in cases of Tilak and Pillay! Why are they imprisoned and exiled? For what? For speaking the truth!

Her pride in the heritage of her Motherland shines forth through her words as she continues:

Why that cringing creature, John Morley, is always talking of his Western institutions and English Oak? We do not want his English institutions. We want back our own country. No English oak is wanted in India. We have our own noble banyan tree and our beautiful lotus flowers. We do not want to imitate British civilization.

No Sir, we will have our own which is higher and nobler. What is Morley's civilization? Persecution of women? For what? For asking their human rights. What do I see all round in this country? Poverty, misery, robbery and despotism.

She ends with the moving appeal:

Hindustanis! our Revolution is holy. Let us send our congratulations to our countrymen and women who are struggling against the British despotism and for their liberty. May their numbers be daily increased! May their organizations become ever so formidable! May our country be emancipated speedily. My only hope in life is to see our country free and united. I beg of you young men to march on. March forward, Friends, and lead our helpless, dying, downtrodden children of Motherland to the goal of Swaraj in its right sense. Let out motto be:

**“We are all for India, India for Indians.”**

# One Crowded Hour

*One crowded hour of glorious life,  
Is worth an age, without a name.*

- Mordaunt

MADAME CAMA'S crowded hour of glory was at the Stuttgart Conference (1907). She had made her mark in history and the ages to come would remember her. Without doubt it was the most significant single act of her entire career. To expose the atrocities of the British, to raise the rebel flag and voice the demand for complete independence in front of an international gathering, had required defiant courage of a high order. But most revolutionaries have that in ample measure.

More important and more glorious however was her steady work spanning three decades, her heroic and consistent deeds over the years. She knew full well what a revolutionary's career entailed. For hers was no impulsive momentary patriotism but an unfaltering dedication to a cause; consistent work in the face of difficulties and problems, and a devotion which did not falter, whether she had physical strength or not.

She has been the cynosure of all eyes, as she stood, proud, tall and erect, dressed in a longsleeved blouse and the traditional Parsee sari. She spoke with bitterness, she spoke with vehemence, she was out for vengeance, she was not going to mince matters. India spoke through her, an India enslaved, impoverished, and humiliated. At the end of her



speech she proudly unfurled the tricolour which she had kept concealed and to the thunderous cheers of the delegates, demanded justice for India. One has to remember that this was as far back as 1907, when India was still slumbering under an alien yoke, when Gandhiji and Nehru had not yet appeared on the Indian scene.

Ably representing the cause of India with the support of the indefatigable Mr Hyndman, she succeeded in presenting for consideration the following resolution:

That the continuance of British rule in India is positively dangerous and extremely injurious to the best interests of India and lovers of freedom all over the world ought to cooperate in freeing from slavery, the fifth of the whole human race inhabiting that oppressed country, since the perfect social state demands that no people should be subject to any despotic or tyrannical form of government.

This was indeed the most far-reaching resolution ever submitted to a World Socialist Conference—virtually demanding that the English leave India as the only expiation for the atrocities perpetuated on its millions. Naturally the English delegation including Ramsday Macdonald, who was later to be first Labour Prime Minister of England—opposed her with might and main, to prevent such a resolution from being adopted. Though she was permitted her fiery speech and managed to unfurl her flag, the resolution was not allowed to be put to the vote on the technical excuse of its not having been submitted to the International Bureau. But there was no doubt where the sympathy of the Congress lay. President Singer himself was to say that “the spirit of the Resolution is approved by the Bureau of the Conference.”

That Madame Bhikhaiji Cama was aware of the Russian delegation is apparent from her speech:

Our people are unable to send delegations to this conference because they are so poor, but I hope one day they will be awakened, when they will follow the example of our comrades from Russia, who are fighting for freedom and to whom we send our special fraternal greetings.

However neither she nor the audience were aware that in the delegation from Russia was Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, then an unknown political leader, who was destined a decade later, to lead the great October Socialist Revolution, ushering in the first socialist state in the world, the U.S.S.R. Madame Cama's triumph at the Congress, was all the more remarkable when we compare the ovation she received to the response evoked by India's delegation to other such Socialist Conference. Three years before at the Amsterdam Socialist Congress, India was represented by the veteran moderate congress leader Dadabhai Naoroji, who only respectfully requested the conference to take steps to ensure introduction of Home Rule in India under British supervision. At a later conference at Stockholm the Indians aspiring to be delegates were told that India could not be represented as there was no socialist party there and if India had been allowed before, it was only as private individuals. Undoubtedly, Madame Cama's success was in large measure due to the personal contacts she and her co-workers had built up among the prominent socialists of Europe.

That tricolour unfurled at Stuttgart is, with some subsequent modification—the rallying point for millions of people today. But few of us Indians who proudly watch it fluttering in our independent skies today, remember, and still fewer even know, that it was a woman, a young exile, Madame Cama who first devised and unfurled the tricolour in a foreign land in August 1907. A flag is far from a mere piece of cloth. It symbolizes the hopes and aspirations of a nation—inspires its people as



Madame Cama's tricolour was to inspire countless revolutionaries during India's long struggle for freedom and its modified version, adopted later, inspires and thrills every Indian today. In Gandhiji's words:<sup>1</sup>

“A flag is a necessity for all nations. Millions have died for it. It is no doubt a kind of idolatry which it would be a sin to destroy. For a flag represents an ideal. The unfurling of the Union Jack evokes in the English breast sentiments whose strength it is difficult to measure: the Stars and Stripes mean a world to the Americans, the Star and the Crescent will call forth the best bravery in Islam.

It will be necessary for us Indians—Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Parsis and others to whom India is their home—to recognise a common flag to live and to die for”.

Jawaharlal Nehru on July 22, 1947 in his speech<sup>2</sup> said, “I remember the ups and downs of the great struggle for freedom of our great nation. I remember, and many in this House will remember, how we looked up to this Flag not only with pride and enthusiasm but with a tingling in our veins and also how, when we were sometimes down and out, the sight of this Flag gave us courage to go on. ...”.

Colourful reports about Madame Cama having torn off her precious silk sari and hurriedly conjured the tricolour out of them, can be discounted as exaggeration, even sheer imagination. On the contrary the flag seems carefully devised and every concept taken care of as Emily Brown points out:

Madame Cama is perhaps best known for having raised the first Indian national flag at the Seventh International

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1. Our Flag (Publications Division) p. 1

2. Ibid p. 8



Congress in August of 1907 at Stuttgart, Germany. The flag which she unfurled had three broad stripes. The top one was green, the sacred colour of the Muslims; the centre band was saffron or golden, the sacred colour of both the Buddhists and the Sikhs, and the lower stripe was the Hindu red. There was a line of eight stars on the top green stripe, emblematic of the eight provinces of India; the words *Bande Mataram* were embroidered in Sanskrit on the centre gold band, and on the bottom red stripe there was an orb on the side toward the staff and near the outer edge, the crescent of Islam. No symbol of the disparate elements which make up India's diverse population was ignored.<sup>1</sup>

The flag was obviously carefully planned and was most probably designed by her jointly with Savarkar. It is interesting to trace the subsequent history of the actual flag Madame Cama displayed at Stuttgart.

According to Dr Minocher K Contractor:

This flag was smuggled into India, along with other records of the revolutionary patriots by the well known Gujarati Socialist leader Shri Indulal Yajnik and kept in a hiding place in Bombay. When he was in Yervada Jail in Poona in 1939, he took the opportunity to invite Shri G.V. Ketkar, grandson of Lokmanya Tilak and former editor of 'Kesari' and 'Tarun Bharat' and gave him a small piece of paper. With this piece of paper Shri Ketkar could secure the whole bundle of papers and the records of the revolutionaries. This bundle contained Madame Cama's original flag. On August 18, 1937, Vir Savarkar unveiled the flag which was neatly put in an ornamental frame and it was taken out in a procession

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1. Emily Brown: *Har Dayal*, p. 68

at Poona. Today this framed flag is hung in the Library Hall of the 'Kesari' and 'Mahratta' office in Poona and is shown to every distinguished visitor".<sup>1</sup>

Of course several replicas and slightly varying versions of the flag existed and Madame Cama herself subsequently always spoke, after first displaying a flag on the wall behind her on the rostrum.

Eight to ten weeks after her triumph at Stuttgart, Madame Cama was in America, on a mission which was to create an awareness of India's plight and aspiration and provide considerable impetus to the Indian National Movement in that country. She was at the height of her power and in constant demand. She lost no opportunity, in her crowded schedule, to employ her oratory and later her pen, in the cause of her country. She launched tirelessly on a campaign, of interviews and speeches wherein she exposed the inequities of British rule and passionately exhorted her audience to help in the enfranchisement of her enslaved country. In October 1907, she arrived in New York from Havre and in her interview to the 'Sun' she announced:

"We are in slavery and I am in America for the sole purpose of giving a thorough expose of the British oppression which is little understood so far away, and to interest the warm hearted citizens of this great republic in our enfranchisement".

She explained:

"You see, England drains our country of all its money, thirty five million pounds sterling go out of India yearly without any return. We have famines and die off by the thousands in consequence of this and subsist partly on

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1. *An Appeal*—Madame Bhikhaiji Cama, pp. 10-11

American charity. We want to educate our people in the practical western way. We have culture; we need money for our vital cause.”

Questioned about the aims of the revolution she made it clear that it was to achieve ‘Swaraj’, ‘Self government’ and to strive for liberty, equality, and fraternity. With her ebullient optimism she added, “With the hope of getting it within ten years” an optimism she was to persistently maintain almost to the end, in the face of reversals and overwhelming odds.

She continued,

“No one concerns how we are persecuted. I could not return to India, I am sure. Only recently two cultured men were arrested and deported without trial for speaking the truth about our country’s condition. Now they are locked up in Burma. Talk about Siberia and its injustices!”

“The most hopeful thing,” according to her was, “the enthusiasm that is spreading among our entire people, slaved and uneducated as many of us are, the past few years have shown an increase of millions of patriots. We should have liberty, fraternity and equality some day.”

When asked by a press correspondent as to how the overthrow of the British was to come about, she explained:

“By passive resistance. We are a peaceable people and unarmed. We could not rise and battle if we would. We are preparing our people for concentrated resistance. All that is needed is unity and organisation, why, in a trice, we could have every Englishman a prisoner in his own house without a drop of blood. All that we have to do is to unify and refuse to work. In five days a bloodless overthrow could be accomplished.”



According to the reporter of the 'Sun' who had interviewed her at the Hotel 'Martha Washington' where she was staying, she was very modest and demurred at the reception to her planned to take place early in November for the purpose of introducing her and her work in New York. "Pray do not let they papers say I am a princess." she exclaimed. "I do not want to be paraded as something which I am not. I am a simple servant of my people who are in slavery." Unassuming and modest she might have been, but the American press really 'went to town' on her visit!

Being so different from the popular image of an Indian woman she enthralled and entranced the audience wherever she went. Here was no demure Eastern lady, spouting the wise philosophy of her ancient land and civilization, but an arresting personality clad in her native silks, talking of violence, revolution and blood! Wherever she appeared she created a stir.

In the American sensational papers she was hailed as a fiery crusader, as the Indian Joan of Arc. She disliked being in the limelight and never sought personal publicity. Her forte was conspiracy. But lecturing meant coming out before the world on a stage in the full glare of publicity and she did not shirk it.

She herself described to her friend M.P.T. Acharya, how the American papers made use of her presence in the U.S.A. for some sensational headlines. Before she went to Chicago, it seems, one paper published a photograph of hers announcing her coming. When she received a copy of that paper, she found on the front page, a large photo reported to be herself. "It was", she described to Acharya with dramatic glee "a figure of somebody, possibly a male, covered up with some kind of oriental shawl on the head, and looking daggers at the reader."<sup>1</sup> Obviously

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1. *Mahratta*, August 12, 1938

Madame Cama did not lack a sense of humour and was not averse to a joke at her own expense.

Though she was not a practised or accomplished lecturer the very fact of an Oriental woman in an Indian sari, explaining her objects and talking vividly of terror and terrorism was enough to convey her meaning and convince the audience.

On October 28, Madame Cama addressed members of the Minerva Club at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel:

“The people here know about conditions in Russia, but I don’t think they know anything about the conditions in India under the English Government. Our best men are deported or sent to prison like criminals, and they are flogged so that they have to go to prison hospitals. We are peaceful, we do not want a bloody revolution, but we do want to teach the people their rights and to throw off despotism”.

She toured the country and wherever she went her flag went with her. It is here that we see her at her magnificent best, calling America a great nation, praising the magnanimity of the Americans, appealing for their help. She was the first unofficial ambassador of the people of India to the people of U.S.A. Always outspoken, at one interview she had dared to say:

“The people of India have culture, the poorest peasants had stored in their memories, all the spiritual truths of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana and they felt it was inconsistent to force Christianity upon a harmless and deeply spiritual people at the point of a bayonet”.

Diplomacy, when it meant concealing the truth, was obviously not her forte!

This remark perhaps infuriated the Churchmen, at whose hands she was to face some heckling. At a meeting convened by the late Dr Cuthbert Hall in the Chapel of the Adams Union Theological Seminary on November 19, 1907, Madame Cama again denounced British rule in unmeasured terms. The other speakers were S.C.K. Rutnam of Ceylon and another Brahmin whose name was not reported. Madame Cama was introduced by Dr C. Hall as a lady from Bombay, a kinswoman of one of the most distinguished Parsee families. She made a speech of the usual kind, unfurling at the close, the national flag. After the Indians had spoken, Bishop Courtney made a few remarks taking the side of the British, who he said "sought the good of the country rather than their own aggrandisement. Can anyone say this is not so?" he concluded. "I can and I can prove it" shouted Myron H. Phelps. He added however that his emotions overcame him to such an extent that he couldn't speak. Then Madame Cama rushed down the aisle to the front pew where the Bishop sat and announced that she had a few things to say, Dr Hall however, did not allow her to address the meeting again.

Ignorant of the true facts, Americans had been indifferent to the political problems of India. Officially the American government was certainly in favour of the British. But when the true nature of British rule was exposed, India's aims and hopes explained, the American people responded with sympathy and understanding and a feeling of goodwill was created between the Indian revolutionaries and quite a large segment of the American people. Earlier in 1893, Swami Vivekananda with his memorable speech at the World Parliament of Religions, in America, had aroused interest in India, and created a favourable impression about her. Indian students migrating abroad for their studies regarded America as an 'ideal country' to emulate. Articles in 'Gaelic American' created a climate favourable towards India. This goodwill and appreciation on



both sides led to the formation of Indo American societies. The Indo American National Association, sympathetic towards Indian national aspirations, was founded by M.H. Phelps in 1907.

In this atmosphere, Madame Cama's visit made a very favourable impact and after her meetings with Barkatulla and Phelps the two societies headed by them decided to work jointly for self-rule for India. Speaking in meeting after crowded meeting, Madame Cama strove to drive home the point that she had come to create a better understanding of the Indian position but more than that her appeal was for humanity, justice and fair play.

1907 had been for Madame Cama a hectic year, a year of constant travel and numerous speeches and had greatly strained her physically. But emotionally it had been a period of exciting challenges and of rewarding experiences.

There is no record of the date of Madame Cama's return to Paris from America. But she was constantly on the move and we learn of her ceaseless activities not only from the correspondence and reports of friends, but as she was under strict police surveillance, from British Intelligence records about her as well.

Press reports about a gathering of Paris extremists in honour of Lala Lajpat Rai mention that Madame Cama was not present as she was away in the North of France. But in October 1908, she attended a meeting at the house of one Khemchand, to meet Bepin Chandra Pal, having specially returned to Paris for this purpose. In December 1908 at a series of lectures by him she made a memorable speech. It was this speech which was reprinted in 'Free Hindustan' and posted to various places in the form of a leaflet 'Bande Mataram', her immortal message to the people of her Motherland.

In January 1909 it was reported that Madame Cama was contributing money towards the funds of the Nationalists in London and in particular, was paying for the printing of seditious literature, sent from Europe. In May, she had reached Paris from London, visited London again and was back in Paris on August 6, to preside over a meeting held at the office of Tata Brothers at 52, Rue Laffitte.

British Intelligence reports give a colourful account of a London India Society meeting at Essex Hall—The Strand on February 20, 1909 on 'Relations between Hindus and Muslims in India'. Before speaking, Madame Cama had taken out from her pocket a silk flag on which were inscribed 'Swadeshi' and 'Bande Mataram'. With this flag hung on the wall behind her, she had delivered her speech saying that she appreciated the Muslims more because they were a stronger and more warlike race and such people were needed at the present crisis if violence had to be used. "Force and violence have become inevitable and without their use liberty is a dream and a mere farce". She had read out a quotation from a printed paper, purporting it to be from Herbert Spencer that "the English at first managed to slip into India through the help of the native army. In 1857 when they got into trouble it was due to the dissatisfaction that prevailed among the troops in the matter of greased cartridges and this trouble brought about by a section of the army was put down by the help of Gurkhas and Sikhs". According to her it all rested in the hands of the Indians themselves for they could free themselves by deserting and leaving the English alone. Indians should not accept any office under the British, but serve themselves to improve trade, industry and arts and the country would be their own. Speaking on her favourite theme of unity, she had this to say, "The relations among the countrymen ought to be firm and resolute, without bringing in the question of unity or religion. People should try to fasten the tie of brotherhood as



strong as they could and they would find it easy to make their way in any direction they chose.”

At this period she was aiding Govinda Amin in his efforts to learn the use of the arms and manufacture of explosives—preparing and forwarding revolutionary literature to India and assisting revolutionary programmes with her advise and valuable financial help. And it was not Indians alone who turned to her for help and advise. Towards the end of August 1910, Madame Cama had received many visits from a mysterious man ‘who came to her house in a motor car’ according to the reports of British Intelligence, and who was later recognised by them as Ferid Bey, President of the Egyptian Nationalist Party. A little earlier Miss Perin Naoroji who was with Savarkar at Victoria Station at the time of his arrest, had returned to Paris, Har Dayal had called on her and the two had gone together to Madame Cama’s place where several Egyptians joined them. The French government had prohibited the holding of the Egyptian National Conference in France. It was decided to hold it at Brussels and for this purpose on September 21, Indian and Egyptian extremists held a soiree at the Palais Hotel Champ Elysees. Next morning they all left for Brussels. At this conference the Indians took an active part and Madame Cama was to proclaim, “What is the use of harping on the international legal position of Egypt? Only bombs and revolvers are the proper answer for foreign occupation.”

In March 1910 Savarkar had been arrested in London and thereafter all Madame Cama’s energies and time were directed in securing his release. In June 1909 Savarkar’s brother Baburao had been arrested on the flimsy pretext of the publication of a provocative poem. This had caused anger and resentment among the revolutionaries abroad. Savarkar swore vengeance but it was Madanlal Dhingra’s hand that was to



wreck the vengeance, when he shot dead Sir Wyllie at the Imperial Institute in London. Savarkar was attacked as the real source of this tragedy, his relatives in India harassed and prosecuted, and their property confiscated. Dhingra was sentenced to death and his martyrdom spelt the end of India House. Savarkar, shadowed by detectives and on the verge of physical collapse, wandered from lodge to lodge. His brother had been sentenced to transportation for life. This savage sentence was promptly avenged by Anant Kanhare who shot dead A.M.T. Jackson, Collector and District Magistrate of Nasik. At the Jackson trial, under police torture Chaturbhuj Amin turned approver and the Browning pistol with which Jackson had been shot and other pistols recovered were traced to Savarkar.

He was in deep trouble, but his Paris friends stood by him. Madame Cama at whose place he stayed looked after him at this time of his dire need. But against the advise of these generous Paris friends Savarkar returned to London only to walk straight into the trap laid for him. He was arrested at the railway station itself. Savarkar has mentioned about the Paris group gathered to see him off—"Amongst them I saw two faces outwardly calm but in fact, very sad—one of Madame Cama, the other of Har Dayal" almost as if they had a foreboding of what was to come.

All their efforts now were to prevent his being sent to India, realizing that any trial there would be a farce and his conviction, a foregone conclusion. Brixton Jail where Savarkar was kept was frequented by the revolutionary group and plans devised for Savarkar's escape. One plan wherein someone resembling Savarkar would take his place and allow him to get free, did not materialize. Another where-in with the help of Irish revolutionaries, the police van carrying Savarkar to the Court would be waylaid could not work out as the van took

a different route. Ultimately Savarkar was sent to India under strict guard on the Peninsular and Orient Liner *S.S. Morea*. When it stopped at Marseilles *en route*, Savarkar made a bold and dramatic attempt to escape. On the excuse of going to the toilet he succeeded in squeezing himself through the tiny porthole and swam towards the quay. Unfortunately an alarm had been raised and after he reached the shore and was on French soil, a French policeman arrested him and handed him back to his British jailors.

He was a political prisoner and as such entitled to political asylum. It was a clear breach of International Right of Asylum and Madame Cama and her fallow revolutionaries were determined to fight this breach of International Law. It is here that Madame Cama's popularity, and influence in European socialist circles becomes apparent. She rallied to the French press. She wired the news of Savarkar's escape to Jean Longuet, grandson of Karl Marx and his paper 'L'Humanite' flashed the episode. Monsieur Jean Jaures, Mayor of Marseilles was also contacted and he took up the case and voiced the demand for the return of Savarkar to France, which was taken up by many newspapers. In the French press and the socialist circles of Europe it caused a tremendous furor and strictures were passed against the French authorities. With these Herculean efforts, Madame Cama succeeded in getting the case referred to the International Court at The Hague. British authorities remained adamant. The Indian trial would proceed but because of the international pressure Madame Cama had brought to bear on this case, as a compromise solution, the sentence of the Indian court would be held in abeyance until The Hague Court judgement. At The Hague, however, British pressure prevailed and the return of Savarkar was ruled out though mention was made that a breach of the right of asylum had accrued. But the case had



created problems for the French Government and ultimately led to the fall of the French Premier.

The whole machinery of the Government of India and pressure of the British Government itself was now directed to ensuring the conviction of Savarkar but Madame Cama valiantly fought the case engaging renowned lawyer Baptista in Bombay for Savarkar's defence. The result however was a foregone conclusion and Savarkar was sentenced and sent to the Andamans.

At the time of Savarkar's arrest, an arrest warrant had been issued for V.V.S. Aiyer also, but he had disguised himself and gone underground. A police alert had been flashed to be on the look out for 'the South Indian Brahmin revolutionary'. But Aiyer cleverly duped British detectives and Padmanabhan recounts an amusing anecdote about it.

While thus the police and their agents were concentrating on London and the routes to Paris and Brazil, Aiyer quietly took a ship to Amsterdam. The route to Holland was not keenly watched. However an intelligence man on board had his own doubts. He had also received an alert about the 'South Indian Brahmin revolutionary'. He had ruled out all persons on board except one bearded gentleman who looked like a Punjabi Sikh. He was well built, had a strong athletic form, a broad intellectual forehead, a bold nose, with the majestic beard adding to the arresting personality. Was he Aiyer? Not likely. Was not Aiyer a South Indian Brahmin, that race of typically thin, small men, more brain than brawn? To fix the identity the detective handed Aiyer, who was reclining on a deck chair, a fake telegram addressed to V.V.S. Aiyer. Aiyer took the telegram without batting an eyelid handed it back saying "But this is for Aiyer, not me".



The answer would have been accepted at once had not Aiyer's suitcase borne the initials V.V.S. inscribed on it. Pointing to the letters on the box the detective looked at Aiyer with a questioning eye. Aiyer just smiled and said "Yes, I am Vir Vikram Singh from the Punjab". Abashed, the British sleuth apologized profusely and retired.<sup>1</sup>

Aiyer landed at Amsterdam and returned by train to Paris where Madame Cama and Shyamji were awaiting him. There was a lot to be done. There was no time to lose as the *S.S. Morea* was expected at Marseilles shortly. They had a rendezvous to keep. In fact some reports on Savarkar's escape speak of two of his compatriots being in the vicinity waiting for him; others mention that Madame Cama and Aiyer rushing to his rescue got delayed on the way, whatever that was, they had failed to rescue him at Marseilles.

The decision of The Hague tribunal in Savarkar's case naturally had a very depressing effect on Madame Cama and her friends. The prevailing state of affairs was described by her in a letter to M.P.T. Acharya in which she says that a year before she was begging him to go to Pondicherry, Indo-China, etc. and had made arrangements but he was cross with her and did not heed her, "Now, when you want to go, I am perfectly helpless. Nobody pays a sou for the cause, even the expenses of 'Bande Mataram' depend on my self-denial. All deshbandhus are forsaking the cause ... since the great master deshbandhu Savarkar is lost. The demoralized people have collapsed and London friends are also having their quarrels." She had also lost much of her money in the legal defence arrangements for Savarkar but she never regretted the sacrifice.

To her, however all these problems were challenges to be met and with her usual spirit, she soon pulled herself out of

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1. R.A. Padmanabhan : *V.V.S. Aiyer*, pp. 85-86

despair and gloom for there was work to be done. British Intelligence reports:

“The arrival in Paris of Ajit Singh, the notorious Punjabi Nationalist who was deported in 1907, has given the party renewed confidence. Madame Cama has written to her friends in London, reproaching them for quarrelling among themselves whereas their duty is to work up the people for the sacred cause of overthrowing the tyrants”.<sup>1</sup>

In December 1912, it was reported that Madame Cama had letters from Hem Chandra Das and Ganesh Savarkar, both prisoners in the Andamans, and had replied. In February 1913 it was found that she was in regular communication with Sardar Rana, Madhav Rao and V.V.S. Aiyer, whom she met or consulted on the phone daily. She continued correspondence with Savarkar in the Andamans, M.P.T. Acharya in New York and other agitators and sent money regularly to Savarkar's family.

British Intelligence was certainly keeping a vigilant watch on her.

At the outbreak of World War I in 1914, some revolutionaries went to Constantinople to enlist the co-operation of the Turks and P.N. Datta sent information from there to Madame Cama that the Turks were very sympathetic. Accordingly, she persuaded Har Dayal to pay a visit there. Prior to her departure for Vichy in April 19, 1914, Madame Cama received several visits from Ajit Singh and Asaf Ali. She was still in Paris in August that year, chiefly it seems due to the difficulty of obtaining ready money. British Intelligence mentions, rightly or otherwise, that Madame Cama and Rana had made arrangements for sudden flight to Switzerland if need arose.

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1. Home Political B. July 1911 (nos. 1-4) National Archives, Delhi

Obviously her health was troubling her. Though one report mentions:

“Madame Cama has quite recovered from her illness and is working with all her old vigour for the cause. Every day she receives visits from young Indians whom she endeavours to inspire with some of her own enthusiasm. She helps to distribute copies of the Gujarati ‘Ghadr’ and carries on a voluminous correspondence with Indian revolutionaries in all parts of the world.”<sup>1</sup>

A later reports says:

“Madame Cama is reported to be in bad health and to have recently consulted several specialists in Paris who do not appear to be able to diagnose her illness. She however still continues her usual active life, receiving many visitors and being constantly occupied with the preparation and transmission of revolutionary literature.”<sup>2</sup>

Dr Abish Chandra Bhattacharya who met her in Paris in 1916 writes about her in his Bengali book ‘Europay Bhartiya Biplaber Sadhana’:

Madame Cama shed tears for Madanlal Dhingra and praised his unparalleled urge for self-sacrifice. Then she broke down when Savarkar was mentioned. She tearfully said, “Savarkar’s powers of thought and action were incomparable. I could not imagine that the British would be able to influence the International Court so much.” Then, after remaining silent for some time, she continued, “The British are the main enemy of freedom in the world. William Pitt, the Senior, Herbert Spencer, none of

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1. Home Dept. Sept. 1914 nos 623-625 Political B.

2. Home Dept. Aug. 1914 nos 623-625 Political B.



them were true Englishmen. True Englishmen are Lord Roberts, Balfour and the two-faced snake John Morley and others". She encouraged us by showing the correspondence she was carrying on with the Irish Republicans, the Polish nationalists and freedom fighters of Egypt, Turkey, Morocco and other places.

She remained prominent in Paris and in July 1916 it was reported in the Paris press, "La Citoyenne Cama (described as a Hindu Socialist), was attending the Congress of the Socialist Federation of the Seine".

The days of World War I were to bring about somewhat of an anticlimax in her life and activities and she was forced to give an undertaking to cease from seditious activities. In the early days of the war she went to Marseilles where some Indian troops had been stationed and tried to influence them that the war was none of India's concern and tried to incite them to lay down their arms. She was then kept under surveillance and internment at Bordeaux and Vichy, throughout the war. The loneliness of internment and the strain of being subjected to strict surveillance broke her health down and she became almost an invalid. The best was now behind her but she bravely struggled on.

With the war, the complexion of politics both national and international changed. Isolated endeavours of inspired individuals were to be replaced by organized efforts at revolt with armed assistance from the enemies of the British. Virendranath Chattopadhyaya devised elaborate plans, tried to secure co-operation from Muslims countries—Turkey, Egypt and Afghanistan; to spread revolutionary ideas among the Sikhs in Hongkong, China and the Pacific Coast of America and to enter into secret understandings with Germany and Japan for their aid. He endeavoured also to spread dissatisfaction and revolt among the Indian troops. To the British and to the

Government of India these schemes sounded unrealistic and over ambitious, but the revolutionaries went a long way towards, putting them into execution.

M.P.T. Acharya mentions about the consideration shown by the French to Madame Cama:

As soon as World War I began, it was natural that she was interned at Vichy though she was loyal to France and there was no danger of her doing anything against France. But it must be said to the credit of the French Government that it did not transport her to inhospitable parts overseas or hand her over to British authorities as it could have done. It seems they had taken into consideration her ill-health also in deciding Vichy as the internment place.

When I met Jean Languet in Berne he told me that he had applied several times to the government to release her owing to her illness but the government was adamant. It is suspected that the British Government has a hand in this attitude. But war alliance would be enough to make the decision as that would please the ally. (*Mahratta*, August 12, 1938).

The weekly report of the Director of Criminal Intelligence dated December 8. 1914 about 'Indian agitation in Europe' states :

"On September 1, Madame Cama was conducted by a police officer from Madame Rana's house at Arcachon to the Sureté General at Bordeaux, where the Prefect of Police requested her to give her word of honour to cease her seditious activities during the war and warned her that if she did not comply, the consequences would be unpleasant. Madame Cama gave the required promise

and she asked permission to visit German prisoners but her request was refused. It is reported that she is very bitter against the French and English governments and is meditating to escape to America".<sup>1</sup>

After the War was over, in 1921, in Berlin, Mrs Evelyn Roy had mentioned to Dr B.N. Dutta that there was to be an International Women's Conference at Moscow and he had been asked to bring a genuine Indian Lady. "Let me try if Madame Cama from Paris can be brought" he had said. But by that time she was too ill and ailing and could not go.

In the assessment of her revolutionary career undoubtedly her years in Paris constitute the most important period of her life. Her leaving London to settle in Paris, had marked the end of an interesting phase in the activities of Madame Cama. But it was destined to be the beginning of another, even more interesting, useful and purposeful period. It was in Paris that she was to spend the most active, meaningful and fruitful years of her life. She was to become not only a well-known citizen 'La Citoyenne Cama' of this historic city, but an Institution; and her little *Pension* in Paris, the unusual 'Salon', not of literary and cultural activities, but of revolutionary conspiracies and activities. She was to emerge as the focal point of Nationalist activities not only in France, but on the whole continent.

Though England had been the first foreign home of Indian revolutionaries, it was in France,, with its traditions of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, that were to find a really safe, long-term heaven and a scope for extending their activities, through contacts with Irish, Egyptian and Russian revolutionaries and by befriending the French socialists. The Paris India Society or Bharat Mandal had many members like B.H. Godrej, K.R.

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1. Home Dept. Political Branch B. Dec. 1914— nos. 227-229



Kotwal besides Madame Cama, Rana, Shyamji, and others. It had the support of the fraternity of rich Indian merchants in Paris who secretly sympathised and helped. The most active leaders were Madame Cama and Savarkar who with their indomitable will and dynamic energy were able to gather around them a group of patriotic youths willing to foresake the comforts of life and their own future prospects. Behind Savarkar and Madame Cama rallied people of different castes, creeds and callings. Madame Cama used to jokingly refer to her modest rooms in her *Pénson* at Rue do Ponthieu as the Headquarters. It is from this headquarters that she published her revolutionary pamphlets and articles, sent messages of comradeship, courage and cheer to fellow revolutionaries all over the world and journeyed to different capitals of Europe, seeking support, and carried on her manifold activities with redoubled vigour. This modest headquarters became the venue of meetings for revolutionaries not only from India but from various other countries. As her fame spread, revolutionaries, Indian and International and famous French Socialists, began a pilgrimage to her boarding house, seeking advice, shelter and succour, going away most impressed by her unbounded energy and inspired by her fearless, selfless devotion to the cause not only of her country, but of all nations in bondage.

For it was in Paris that her horizons were to be widened and expanded. Changes in her attitude towards National Liberation struggles, imperialism and the world-wide socialist movement were to become manifest. She was not concerned merely with India's freedom struggle any more but actively interested in the liberation struggles of Turkey, Egypt, Israel and Morocco. She was to establish and maintain personal contacts and relations with leaders of National Liberation Movements of various countries. For she had realized the need for mutual relations between the subject nations struggling for their freedom. She had developed a world outlook. From

her intense Indian Nationalism, Madame Cama the internationalist had emerged.

Even British Intelligence was to take cognisance of this new development in their reports.

But India Nationalism is not a wide enough field for her energies. Her war cry is 'The Orient for the Orientals.' She does not believe that any Asiatic nation will achieve independence until the power of Asia as a whole is equal to that of Europe. Egyptians, Turks, Russians, come to her for help and sympathy. (Home Dept. Sept. 1914, nos 623-625, Political B).

It is amazing how farsighted she was. As early as 1909, she had realized that Berlin would be the safest place for the revolutionaries to carry on their propaganda unhindered, and that friendly relations with Germany would help the Indian cause. She had undertaken a lecture tour to enlighten Germans about Indian political aspirations. The Indian revolutionaries seem to have had an inkling of the forthcoming conflict between Germany and England and were preparing to take advantage of it.

To Madame Cama goes the distinction of being the first Indian patriot to have faith in socialist ideals and to realize the significance of the struggle of the Russian people.

According to Virendra Chattopadhyaya, she was the first Indian revolutionary to be inspired and impressed by Lenin and used to talk about him to her fellow revolutionaries. Speaking on the occasion of the Paris Commune Day at Leningrad on March 18, 1934, he said :

“For the first time I heard of Lenin in the summer of 1910, when I joined the colony of Indian political emigrants living in Paris as I had to flee from England

to escape impending arrest. One of the emigrants was a woman, Bhikhaiji Cama. She became a socialist and joined the French Socialist Party. She participated in the Stuttgart Congress of the second Socialist International in 1907 as a delegate. Lenin mentioned the presence of the Indian delegates without names. Bhikhaiji Cama used to tell us about Lenin and the Russian Social Democrats and their attitude towards the questions of War and the right to self determination of nation. But none of us understood at that time the enormous significance of the split in the Social Democratic Party and the role of Lenin.”<sup>1</sup>

Madame Cama took a keen interest in the Russian Revolution. She kept close contact with Mikhail Pavlovich, a Russian revolutionary living in exile in Paris and through him came to know about the first Russian Revolution, its motives and aims and the socialist ideals. He was to write about her:

“Cama showed keen interest in the Russian Revolution’s events, particularly the 1905 Revolution. She wanted to know about the role of the working class in the Movement. During those days she also read some literature on the theory of Marxism.”<sup>2</sup>

He also wrote, “She was far from a young woman, of poor health, but spiritually strong and lively. She produced the impression of a good comrade and we rapidly became good friends.” They often met and discussed the question of the liberation movement in India. “Cama was the only person, not Shyamji or Ranaji who showed particular interest in the Russian Revolution and saw in it an inspiring example for India to follow.”<sup>3</sup>

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1 & 2. *Bulu Roy Chowdhury* : Madame Cama, p. 20

3. *Ibid* 21-22



Deeply perceptive, she had realized the significance of the epoch and that is why she followed Lenin's role with interest.

Being a keen student of politics and looking for a successful revolutionary theory, Madame Cama had started to study the experiences of the Russia Revolutionary Movement. The Russian Narodniks who employed tactics of individual terrorism first attracted her and the brave Sofya Perovskaya, executed for her attempt on Tsar Alexander III's life was her ideal and upheld her as an example to follow. Later, attracted by the 1905 Revolution in Russia she studied the role of masses in revolutionary movements, and came to the realization that success could be achieved not through heroic acts of individual terrorism but through mass action or movement of the people. With the Russian Revolution of 1917 new hopes were aroused in Madame Cama. In fact she was an internationalist, who understood the importance of the great October Revolution of 1917 and valued friendship between India and the Soviet Union.

She was in contact and in correspondence with Maxim Gorky and had sent him some Indian Revolutionary literature. Gorky had requested her to write an article on 'The Indian Woman' for the Russian press. "Russian Democracy, Russian women, will be very grateful to you for showing them the struggle of the people living on the banks of the Ganges – that is, the democrats and women of great India".

Madame Cama replied to Gorky on October 31, 1912:

All my time and energy are devoted to my country and her struggle. But if I can write an article dedicated to the cause of my nation, I shall put all my energies, to fulfil your offer. If there be any payment for the

articles, I will tell you frankly it will be very much appreciated. I am also sending you a copy of Savarkar's book.

With sisterly regards,  
B.R. Cama

The letters are preserved in the Archives of the great Russian writer together with Cama's photograph picturing her next to an unfurled Indian flag. The inscription on the photograph "*Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God*" can serve as a motto of Cama's life.

When Mikhail Pavlovich was leaving Paris for home, Madame Cama sent a letter through him to Gorky, requesting that it be published in Russia. Unfortunately this letter was lost and her contacts with Gorky not resumed thereafter.

## **‘Bande Mataram’**

MADAME CAMA had long been on the look out for a medium through which she could reach the common man as well as the intelligentsia, to disseminate knowledge and information and keep kindled the fires of patriotism. For this purpose a radical newspaper would be the ideal vehicle and medium. With this aim in view ‘Bande Mataram’ was started in September 1909. And aptly named ‘Hail Motherland’, because Madame Cama was to pay homage to her Motherland through every line appearing in print in ‘Bande Mataram’.

She had been amongst the first to realize the power of the Press and to lay stress on the publication of revolutionary literature. Even before leaving for America, on September 4, 1907 in her letter from Villa Liberty, Carlsbad to the ‘Indian Sociologist’, she had sagaciously pointed out. “This fact emphasizes the importance of having a central press in Paris (beyond the reach of the tyrannical English) where we can publish all necessary circulars, etc. in different Indian vernaculars. It is high time you should take up this pressing matter in hand first of all. Every Indian must be convinced that if Russian methods are carried on in our country rigorously by our oppressors, the so called British rulers, we must meet it with measure for measure. The Russians are getting everything printed in Switzerland and thus they do not risk the freedom of their most valuable heads like Mr Pal.

“I wish I could go to Calcutta and take up the thread where he left it and keep up giving the open air lectures to the masses while he is absent, but I have already made arrangements for going to the U.S.A. at the suggestion of Mr



O'Donnell in the ‘Indian Sociologist’ of this month.”

The above letter was published in the November issue of the ‘Indian Sociologist’.

At the passing of the notorious Press Act in India she was to write in the March 1910 issue of her ‘Bande Mataram’ that it was a confession of defeat on the part of the Indian Government and a tribute to the efficiency of the Revolutionary Party. She emphasized that the Act would not affect the future of their cause, since revolutionary journals and books were being printed abroad. “We must recognize that importation of the revolutionary literature into India from abroad is the sheet-anchor of the party” and “the centre of gravity of political work has shifted from Calcutta, Poona and Lahore to Paris, Geneva, Berlin, London and New York.”

Though the British did not succeed in persuading French authorities to hand Madame Cama over to them for her anti-British activities, they banned her from ever entering India. As if in retaliation, Madame Cama penned in ‘Bande Mataram’ the fiercest attacks on the British Raj, publishing them from Geneva in order to avoid embarrassing the French whose hospitality she enjoyed.

Besides this relentless propaganda against British rule, in 1910 ‘Talwar’ was also started from Berlin by Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, its supervision and distribution entrusted to Madame Cama. It was to advocate political assassinations as a preliminary to actual revolution. Both papers were banned in India, but the revolutionaries distributed them to their compatriots all over the world since the British Government could not legally intercept mail to other countries.

The character of Madame Cama’s campaign can be best ascertained from a perusal of some extracts from the ‘Bande

Mataram' published by her under her own name. The first number was dated Geneva, September 10, 1909 and the paper continued to appear once a month thereafter, always with the heading Geneva, though, according to British Intelligence sources, after September 1910, it was usually printed at Rotterdam (Holland) and issued by Madame Cama from Paris.

In volume I, no. 1, September 1909, the editor proposes to continue the work initiated by the brave and wise leaders of Bengal through the medium of 'Bande Mataram'; which had now become impossible in India owing to the tyranny of the British Government. There were three stages to be passed through; the first, of educating the people, the second, war and the third, reconstruction. "These three stages of every national movement must be passed through. History cannot alter its course for India. After Mazzini, Garibaldi; after Garibaldi, Cavour. Even so it must be for us. Virtue and wisdom first, then war, finally independence." (Home Dept., July 1913, Appendix).

Another article, paying tribute to Dhingra was entitled 'Dhingra the Immortal'.

Volume I, No. 6 of February 1910 makes mention of the 'Talwar':

The 'Talwar' has made its appearance in Berlin, the capital of the country which is at present most hostile in spirit to England. We congratulate our comrades on their choice. The arms of the British empire cannot reach them in that heaven of refuge and the cultivation of friendly relations with the powerful German nation will be of great advantage to the cause of Indian Independence. (Proceedings of the Home Dept., July 1913, Appendix).

Vol. I, No. 7, March 1910, characterizes the Indian Press Act as a confession of defeat on the part of the British

Government and stressing the importance of revolutionary literature published from abroad, urges that the circulation of revolutionary literature should be looked upon as a sacred duty by all patriots. Commenting on the Nasik murders it writes, “The possession of Browning pistols by the hero is testimony to the efficiency and secrecy of the revolutionary organisations”.

Vol. I, No. 12, August 1912, remembers the Indian Martyrs:

The month of August is full of sacred memories for us. On August 10, 1909, Khudiram Bose, the hero martyr passed away from this world of sin and sorrow, giving his life to lighten the burden of its misery. And on 17th of the same month, last year, Madanlal Dhingra, followed the footsteps of the martyrs who had gone before.

In a signed article in Vol.II, No.3, Madame Cama wrote:

“Young Hindustan, young Egypt and young Ireland, I will republish for you a pamphlet ‘How the Russians organize a Revolution’ and I think you will find it interesting and instructive. My young friends and comrades, I am not for imitating or aping but it is necessary to study all the different methods and then alone can we pick out what is best adaptable to our dispositions and circumstances.”

In Vol. III, No. 1, September 1911, addressing the Hindus in Europe she says:

“I also appeal to your patriotism to make the best of your stay in the west by taking all kinds of physical training (which is not allowed in our country). Above all learn how to shoot straight because the day is not far when coming into the inheritance of ‘Swaraj’ and ‘Swadeshi’, you will be called upon to shoot the English



out of the land which we all love so passionately.”

In Vol. IV of September 1916, Madame Cama invites her friends to send articles for publication and says:

“Let me assure you compatriots that I do take all the responsibilities and you may write as strongly as you like. No writer’s name will be published or even given out (unless one signs one’s article) and all manuscripts will be destroyed before the paper is sent out.”

Revolutionary literature from abroad was influencing minds in India and leading to the spread of revolutionary ideas. Resourceful Indians in Paris were behind this and defied all British efforts to stop it. Madame Cama thus carried on a ceaseless struggle through the power of her pen but she had not ruled out the power of the gun “to shoot the English out of India” as she repeatedly put it. She realized that the time for mere rhetoric was past, it was time for practical, concrete, and fruitful action. What was needed was not brave words also but words backed by work, practical service and sacrifice. There was a very practical side to this idealistic woman. Being aware of the handicap of her brother revolutionaries in India, shortage of arms, she took to supplying small arms including revolvers concealed in book covers and even toys, and false bottoms of boxes. Besides the inspiration of her words, she strove to render both material and technical help to young revolutionaries. Hemchandra Kamgo in his ‘Bangalaya Biplat Prachista’ narrates his own experience. He and other terrorist colleagues had arrived in Paris to learn the use of firearms and technique for making bombs. For such training, an introduction to the right people was essential. In all Paris whom could they turn to? None but the deceptively fragile Mother of the Revolution. It was Madame Cama who was to provide the introduction and all other necessary assistance. She spent freely of her own time, money and energy towards

building up a revolution in India.

The revolutionaries intensified their activities by trying to master bomb making techniques through their contacts with Russian revolutionaries. A manual on bomb making was procured, translated and copies smuggled into India. At this stage the amazing Madame Cama took to the cult of the bomb as calmly and composedly as she had taken to social work in her younger days. In the wake of this new acquisition followed a spate of clandestine activities to which she extended all help and support. In these Hem Chandra Das played the key role. A Russian anarchist in Paris trained young Indian revolutionaries in the use of explosives before they returned to India to put his training into practice. Even when the Browning pistols had been purchased in Paris and secretly despatched, every detail of the plan was so meticulously worked out that the Indian police failed to trace the origin and supply of these weapons.

Even after Savarkar's arrest, the policy of political assassinations was not abandoned. When Mr Ashe, District Magistrate of Tennevelly was killed, 'Bande Mataram' stated in Vol. II, No. 12, August 1911:

The moral is clear. We have done very well to strike down Englishmen, for we have given them fair warning that the inevitable war that lies between them and us has already begun. And we must continue to rejoice each time an Englishman is sent to his doom by some brave patriot.

Hard words those, specially coming from a woman and a woman who otherwise displayed sensitivity and compassion. But then Madame Cama was a woman with a mission.

The confrontation reached its climax. The British Government tried various measures to counter her moves, but



they found in Madame Cama a tireless rebel, impossible to contain. In desperation they censored her mail, even declared her an absconder and abettor. Orders were issued for the interception of her mail and a thorough check was to be carried out at all the seaports. But such tactics could not defeat her and her leaflets and parcels continued reaching India via Pondicherry.

An order from the Director, Criminal Intelligence regarding interception under Section 26 of the Post Office Act, of all postal articles addressed to Madame B.R. Cama “the notorious Parsee lady of Rue de Ponthieu” states:

“We have received information that during her recent visit to Vichy, she very frequently received letters from India and the proposed interception is suggested as much with a view to discovering who her correspondents in India are as to ascertaining the nature of the correspondence. Sir Charles Cleveland, noting this lady’s activities a few months ago, remarked that there was a good deal going on in her circle to which we had no clue and I am of the opinion that this view of the position still holds ... there will be no practical difficulty in giving practical effect to an order to intercept all postal articles addressed from India to Madame Cama, the places the interception would take place, being Calcutta, Bombay and the sea post office between Bombay and Aden.

I enclose a copy of Madame Cama’s history sheet....it supplies ample proof of Cama’s constant co-operation with the leaders of revolutionary movements all over the world and shows in her own language that she regards herself as engaged, in a revolutionary campaign against the British Government in India. She is anarchical, revolutionary, anti-British and irreconcilable. This being



so it is clearly in the interests of public safety and tranquility that her correspondence should be scrutinized.”

Madame Cama had succeeded in influencing some other Indian women also and making them converts to their country's cause. The ‘Indian Sociologist’ of September 1907 had stated:

“We announce with great pleasure that at the instance of Madame B. R. Cama, with whose name our readers are familiar, some Indian ladies residing in Paris, have offered a lectureship of the value of Rupees One thousand in connection with our society of Political Missionaries. The lectureship is open to Indian ladies only and all candidates must be in complete sympathy with the objects of the society”.

She had always been active in women's movements and in 1906 had attended a meeting of the International Council for Women and made a plea for justice for India. She fully believed in women playing their legitimate part in public affairs. Dadabhai Naoroji's grand daughter had fallen under her spell and had imbibed her revolutionary ideas. When Savarkar was arrested at Victoria Station in March 1910, Perin Naoroji had been travelling with him from Paris. During subsequent court proceedings she openly showed her active sympathy with the revolutionary party and greeted Savarkar with *Bande Mataram*.

Obviously this had not escaped the notice of British Intelligence and their report of June 1911 states:

“I am directed to state for the information of the Government of India that the Governor in Council proposes in the interest of public safety and tranquility to issue an order Section 26 of The Indian Post Office Act (VI of 1898) directing the foreign and home correspondence of the Parsee ladies noted in the margin,

shall be intercepted and delivered to the Commissioner of Police, Bombay for such period as the government may consider necessary.

It has been represented that these young ladies are on terms of intimacy not only with the Indian extremists in Paris but also with foreign anarchists. Miss Perin Naoroji is reported to have promised on her return to India to devote her life to the revolutionary movement”.<sup>1</sup>

The names of the ladies “noted in the margin” were Miss Perin A.D. Naoroji, Miss Goshi A.D. Naoroji and Miss Nergez A.D. Naoroji.

The following extracts from British reports reveal how they viewed Madame Cama’s activities.

“We have every reason to suspect this woman of dangerous correspondence which it is in the interest of public safety and tranquility to intercept”. And again in 16.6.1913, the reply to it:

“I fully agree. I do not know how this has not been done before in the period of greater unrest, just at present, it is important to discover her correspondents in a short time. However, other addresses will be resorted to as soon as she suspects that her correspondence is being intercepted”.

Obviously they were aware of her resourcefulness and had to devise schemes to counter it.

“Pondicherry is a dangerous anarchical centre and it is possible that some of Cama’s correspondence from persons at that place might be most easily intercepted at Madras”.

Also,

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1. *Home Political* 1911 June, No. 157

We have recently been informed that Cama receives mail at her address in Paris under the name of Mrs Bradley and that there is no Mrs Bardley living there. The words “or to Mrs Bradley” therefore are to be inserted after the word Cama, in that order.

(“All articles sent by the following persons of Pondicherry to M.P.T. Acharya believed to be in Europe, Shyamji Krishnavarma at Paris or elsewhere and Madame Cama at Paris or elsewhere be intercepted and delivered to the Superintendent of Police”.)

When even these actions failed to check her activities, the British Government resorted to another desperate measure in the hope of putting a stop to her activities. She was declared an absconder from justice under Section 98 of the Criminal Procedure Code on non-execution of warrants and her Trust property in India worth Rupees One lakh seized, to deprive her of material resources. Letters flew between the various concerned British authorities, trying to circumvent the legal maze for seizing her property and to justify their action in doing so.

Quoted below are some extracts from the voluminous correspondence on this subject:

There seems to be no difficulty in attaching the interest obtainable from this Trust Fund if the magistrate considers the case against Madame Cama strong enough to issue a warrant for her arrest.

In their notes on this file dated 1/2 and 3/2 respectively late secretary and Hon’ble Member desired that a case should be drawn up for the opinion of the Advocate General. Will P.A. please draft a succinct statement of the case against Madame Cama and her Indian money.



I am ready to speak if the P. A. wishes.

sd. C.R. Cleveland  
24.6.1910

Madame Cama could be charged with sedition or abetting sedition, under Section 124A or 124A/109 I.P.C.

She has done nothing in India, so far as I know, to bring her within the scope of the I.P.C. but as a native Indian subject, is amenable to the provision of the I.P.C. even for acts committed outside British India (Sec. 4 I.P.C.).

The evidence against her is briefly as follows:

(1) Her name appears on the front page of the frankly seditious and revolutionary 'Talwar' as the person to whom communications and remittances should be addressed.

(2) Both these papers—'Bande Mataram' and 'Talwar' are openly opposed to British rule in India and intended for circulation in India and are in fact sent to India. *Prima Facie* she supports or abets these seditious journals.

(3) She appears similarly to have abetted the publication of Savarkar's Mutiny book. It was distributed with a printed notice saying that remittance might be sent to Madame Cama.

(4) A violently revolutionary leaflet headed '*Bande Mataram—A Message to the People of India*' purporting to be written by her (Bhikhaiji R. Cama) was sent to India in large numbers about December 1908. It is substantially the same as a speech she is reported to have delivered in December 1908. I think this pamphlet constituted *a prima facie* case against her under Section 124A I.P.C.

(5) A clearly seditious article appeared over her name in the ‘Indian Sociologist’ dated September 4, 1907.

(6) Then we have a great number of newspaper reports of rabidly revolutionary speeches by her in Stuttgart, in America, in England, besides information of seditious speeches and acts from private sources.

Hence, if she were in India, she could be proceeded against, under Section 124 A or 124A/109 I.P.C.

The question now arises whether action can be taken under Sec. 87 or 88 C.C.P.

In any case it will be first necessary for some magistrate, to issue a warrant for her arrest. I am not sure if a magistrate before whom a complaint of the facts might be laid, would be justified in issuing a warrant, knowing the accused to be outside British India. He would know that the warrant would not be executed (Sec. 82 C.C.P.). Even if the offence were an ‘extradiction crime’ which it is not the offender would not be extradited merely on the authority of a warrant of a British Court in India. The issue of a warrant therefore seems so futile that I do not think the magistrate would be justified under Sec. 204 C.C.P. in considering that there was ‘sufficient grounds for proceeding.’

But supposing that a court should issue a ‘proforma’ warrant even so I think that the provisions of Section 87(I) C.C.P would not apply. There is no reason to believe that Madame Cama has either ‘absconded’ or ‘concealed herself’. By ‘absconding’, I think we must mean leaving some locality after the commission of some offence, but in this case Madame Cama ‘absconded’ from India (so to speak) before the commission of any offence. I do not think that can be called ‘absconding’ within the intention of the legislature.

Then again there is no question of 'concealment' Madame Cama has made herself only too prominent by her flag-waving and rabid eloquence. The application of Section 87(2)(a) and (b) would also given rise to difficulty, since there is no place in India where she 'habitually resides', having left India about 8 years ago.

The main difficulty however I think is that she is not absconding or concealing herself (if I understand the words correctly) and therefore Sec. 87 and 88 C.C.P. are inapplicable.

sd. C.M. King  
1.7.1910

Home Department may now see, this file with reference to the question of attaching Madame Cama's Indian properties raised by Sir Harold Stuart and Sir Harvey Adamson in their notes of 1/2 and 3/2 respectively.

I do not think that the question of proceeding under ordinary law is sufficiently practical to make it worthwhile referring to the Advocate General. But I strongly advise the question being considered with reference to procedure by Ordinance or Regulation. In this case a native Indian subject resides abroad, and uses her Indian properties for the furtherance of serious crimes in India. One of these days we may be confronted with a similar position on a very much larger scale. The case of Madame Cama is by no means trivial. I think it should now be decided whether we could move in her case and we can defer the question of whether it is expedient to move. I can only think of Regulation III of 1818. The separate attachment of 'Estates and Lands', 'Estates or Lands' and 'Lands or Estates' is mentioned under those terms in that Regulation. If Home Department thinks there is a *prima facie* case under the Regulation, a clear reference



might be made to the Legislative Department. I suggest the whole file should not be sent, merely a statement of the general principles which require elucidation. If Home Department wishes that statement can be drawn up in my office on return of the file.

sd. C.R. Cleveland

2.7.1910

It is amusing to watch the British authorities tying themselves into knots on the legalities and possibilities of proceedings against Madame Cama for attaching her properties.

## Bhickoo—The Woman

AT BIRTH, she had been named Bhikhaiji, an unwieldy, pompous name for so endearing and sprightly a child. Her doting father shortened it to Bhickoo and Bhickoo she remained thereafter to family and friends, throughout her life.

What was she really like, this 'Mother of the Indian Revolution', a pain in the neck of British Imperialism, whom British this 'notorious lady of Rue De Ponthieu' as the British described her—one of the 'Terrorist Trio' of Paris, regarded as a reincarnation of Kali; looked upon as a 'Dangerous Revolutionary' even by her Parsee relatives who shied away from dealings with her. Was she a bloodthirsty firebrand, whose activities and writings could jolt a mighty Empire, a pain in the neck of British Imperialism, whom British files described as anarchical, revolutionary, anti-British and irreconcilable?" In the confidential report of the British Government on 'Political Trouble in India 1907-1917' this notorious Madame Cama figures very prominently.

Undoubtedly she was a fiery rebel, advocating and even inciting violence. But very near the surface of Madame Cama, the violent revolutionary, lurked Bhickoo, the warm-hearted, motherly woman. And of this woman we have numerous glimpses in the personal reminiscences and writings of people who knew or met her. Many have referred to her kindly affection and concern, her generosity towards young revolutionaries in pecuniary and other difficulties. Savarkar regarded her as the Mother of the Revolution and himself as almost her adopted son. "How I esteem her noble life and her

solicitude for the needy and the distressed” he was to write of her from his cell in the Andamans.

About her reputation as a ‘Dangerous Revolutionary’ Adi K. Sett, one of her relatives has vividly recounted his own experience<sup>1</sup>:

“Whatever else you may do, do not attempt to meet Bhikhaiji Cama in Paris and do not carry any letters or messages from her to anyone in England”, said my mother, very emphatically to me, before I left for my studies. She added, “She is a dangerous revolutionary.” “Bawaji was given a letter by Bhickoo in Paris to be delivered in London”, continued my mother, “He tore it up and threw it out of the window of his compartment as his train was proceeding to Paris.” The Bawaji referred to was my maternal grandfather and a magistrate, so one could forgive him for tearing up a secret epistle. Anyone agitating against British Raj those days was termed a revolutionary. My mother, incorrigible and self-contradictory said to me in Paris, while we were on our summer holiday, a year later, after I had mellowed and ripened a little in London, “I think we should call on Bhickoo Cama.” I made no comment. Bhickoo was related to my mother in a distant way. We ferreted her out in taxi which careered madly through the crowded streets. She was staying at a modest pension. She embraced me when my mother introduced us. I took to this kindly old lady from the very first. I never addressed her as Mrs Cama, Madame Cama or auntie Bhickoo, but called her affectionately merely by her first name. She liked that. She was seated in a dim

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1. *Bicoo Cama—a Medallion of Memories*; Illustrated Weekly of India, January 28, 1962



and dingly parlour along with other old men and women mostly French, who seemed most interested to hear us converse in Gujarati. When we laughed they did the same, when we smiled, they grinned and when there was a sorrowful note in our talk, those men and women seemed to sadden.

She talked of every relative dead or alive. Politics we never discussed, save very vaguely and swiftly. But she was always afire with her old courage and enthusiasm. "The English should be driven out of India," she would say, "They are crushing our country under their heels, sucking the blood of our people, living on their flesh." She never showed me her famous flag which she had carried about with her from country to country through-out Europe. She spoke of Tilak and Gokhale in a reminiscent mood.

She could not avoid the reminiscences and the remembrance of home. Madame Cama, tough though she was, could not escape the longings of all exiles, for in Nehru's words: "In spite of the passage of time, no exile can escape the malady of his tribe, the 'consumption of the soul' as Mazzini called it."

Did not Bhickoo miss what could have been? Brought up in the comforts and trappings of a luxurious home, the affectionate security of a large family, how did she feel, having to spend over thirty years in the austere rooms of a French *pension*? She could and did hide her feelings under a courageous cloak and her dedication to a noble cause sustained and satisfied her. But glimpses of nostalgia even of longing peep through her queries about relatives, a bunch of flowers reminding her of her garden in Bombay; eagerness for photographs from home. She was not an austere recluse, but

a spirited woman, mischievously teasing Indian boys who had forgotten their native tongue. She remained elegant and well dressed, until in later years she was too ill to care. The society lady in her, completely submerged, surfaces some times as in her request in her letter to Dadabhai Naoroji on January 27, 1906 for tickets, to watch the pomp and pageantry of Parliament opening.

“I am staying here till the end of February, so Mrs D.P. Cama and I, we both would like to see the King’s opening of the House in State on the 19th February. I feel ashamed of myself for bothering you about it, but I think perhaps you can ask Sir Henry Cotton if he shall be able to get two tickets for us in the stranger’s gallery”.

She was human after all!

As a young woman she had been uncommonly good looking, an attractive lady with striking large eyes. She had imbibed some of the Parisian chic and as some early photographs show, dressed elegantly, the sari borders repeated on her blouses for additional effect. On her American tour in 1907, the reporter of ‘The Sun’ describes her thus:

When seen in her apartment at the Hotel Martha Washington, Madame Cama expressed herself with dignified enthusiasm. She is a handsome woman, with large eyes and is of lighter colour than the East Indians are usually seen. Her voice is sweet and well modulated and she speaks excellent English besides several other languages. She wears a costume which appears to be a compromise between the native flowing robes and modern European dress.

Later, as her health deteriorated she was to become careless of her appearance and with the hardships of a

revolutionary's life, she seems to have aged fast. People who met her when she was hardly in her sixties describe her as old and wrinkled.

In 'Life and Myself' Harin Chattopadhyaya speaks of the period about 1921, when she was 60 years old:

Before we left we met a very important person, whose name was a password - among Indian revolutionaries abroad - an old, wrinkled woman, with large wrists and hands and a face which seemed obviously the history of Indian Revolution; every line traced upon it was a sentence which expressed a determination to help to set India free. (p. 193). She had declared:

"I shall never return to an India of slaves, I shall only go back to her when she is free. And I have so many brave sons who are doing their best, sacrificing every pore of their bodies, every drop of their blood, every second of their lives, in thought of their Motherland whom they are going to help become free". "That woman of true greatness" writes Chattopadhyaya, "That mother of all celebrated Indian revolutionaries and exiles from home was known as Madame Cama. She is no more now, but every fighter in the cause of Indian freedom should know of her, if he did not have the privilege of knowing her". (p. 194).

Her later photographs indicate that her once fragile figure had broadened, her face filled out, but she still had presence and personality.

Jawaharlal Nehru who encountered her during his European tour in 1926, wrote in his 'Autobiography':

We saw, Madame Cama, rather fierce and terrifying as she came up to you and peered into your face and



pointing at you, asked abruptly who you were. The answer made no difference (perhaps she was too deaf to hear it) for she formed her own impressions and stuck to them despite facts to the contrary (p. 154).

However, the impression she made on the gracious Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya was very different. This lady, a legendary figure of India herself, says:

One other legendary figure I met in Europe was Madame Cama, of whom I had long heard of as a young revolutionary from Bombay now in exile in Paris. I was thrilled to meet her. Unlike the restless group in Berlin she was a composed personality, though still full of the old fervour and very optimistic about India's freedom. While chatting, by some happy accident, I referred to our having to devise a national flag at the Berlin Women's Congress. She suddenly burst into hilarious laughter. "Early in the century when so many of us Indian students were becoming nationally astir, we sorely felt the same need you folks did for a national flag. So, I picked on my little brain and devised a flag which all the Indian students used in Europe. That proves the old saying 'Adversity is the mother of invention!' I bowed to her. "Yours, dear lady, was a true invention. Mine was only a copy of what we have adopted as a National Flag. Nevertheless we were sisters in adversity". Whereupon, lovingly, she first clasped my hand and clasped me to her bosom and I felt truly blest. She was fortunate enough to live to see India, to return to her country, unlike Virendranath Chattopadhyaya who pined for his home in vain.

Sociable and gregarious she revelled in meeting people, and friends recall the happy gatherings in Paris presided over by her. In all the tumult of a revolutionary's life she retained her

impassioned hunger for human kinship and affection. One side of her was the motherly Madame Cama, looking after people and their needs, fond of entertaining; generous and kind. Another side was the passionately committed revolutionary—spouting fire and violence. Though much older in years than others of her group, she was a comrade to ‘my boys’ and throughout her life was to retain her concern and identity with the needs of the young.

It was in this bond of comradeship and working together for a common noble cause, and in her ‘motherings’ of the younger revolutionaries that she found compensation for the rigours of exile. Madame Cama shared with her compatriots abroad a deep and unquenchable hunger to free India from slavery. Though pain and sorrow was often their lot, they faced trials and reverses and had their moments of despair, they had unwavering faith and unfaltering courage and they did not succumb to gloom or misery. Their secret lay in their knowledge of belonging to a closely knit team, in which no one was excluded or isolated, no one had to walk alone – and they had their dreams.

It was only thanks to her vigilance that both Savarkar and V. Chattopadhyaya had escaped to France in the nick of time. Always on the alert, in touch with the activities of spies and informers, she was aware when any other revolutionary ‘sons’ were in danger and she had the power and influence to thwart the plans of her enemies. She was not only a firebrand Mother of the Revolution, but a kindly mother to the revolutionaries.

Practically every evening the revolutionaries would meet somewhere. Often people like Ferid Bey and Dr Mansur of Egypt, the venerable Hyndman, leading French socialists, Jean Longuet, Jean Jaures and others visited them. When Madame Cama could not receive all her friends at her small *pension*, she would host tea parties at a cafe at Rond-Point des



Champs Elysees in Paris. There all details of revolutionary work were discussed and colonial policies of different countries of Europe criticised.

Being large hearted and above petty jealousies she was called upon to settle disputes and personal intrigues among her colleagues. When Rana was almost boycotted by all, Madame Cama did not disown him. Nor did she criticize Shyamji for his vacillating views and articles as the others had done. But this role of hers was not apparent to British Intelligence whose records state that Chattopadhyaya and other Paris revolutionaries were finding her behaviour dictatorial and intolerable and were hoping to get rid of her. A case of 'sour grapes' and wishful thinking it seems. Undoubtedly in her declining years, broken in health, she was to be pained and disheartened by the attitude of some co-workers. To Acharya she wrote: "Nobody pays a sou—even the expenses of 'Bande Mataram' depend on my self-denial.... *deshbandhus* here are forsaking the cause, London friends are having their quarrels." Time and again, in her closing years there would be a return to despair— she cared too much for the cause, but time and again her ebullient optimism would come to the fore and she would continue to hope.

The picture of an endearing humane person emerges from the personal reminiscences of Mr Cooper. Of friendly disposition she had friends among the business community— Ranas, Coopers, Dinshaw Petit family and Saklatwalas. She also had some French ladies as her friends. Madame Cadiou at 140 Boulevard Montparnasse, Paris, to whom some copies of 'Bande Mataram' were sent; Madame Levi, a broker and others. Though living modestly compared to her Bombay background, she lived comfortably—even if she had to sell her jewellery to manage. Most of the money she received from her father's Trust, she spent for the cause.



As festivals of all communities were celebrated by the Paris Indians, she would be sent *doodhpak* and *pourries* by her Gujarati friends; *ravo* and *sev* by Parsee friends. Fond of good food she enjoyed spicy Indian food and rich sweets despite doctor's orders—to a rebel like her, doctor's orders were only to be disobeyed! She herself would surprise visitors by serving Indian delicacies, which she kept sending for from India.

If she remained Indian in her food habits—she was loyal to the languages of India as well. Anyone who pretended ignorance of his Indian background or language, invited her sarcasm. But she was jovial and gregarious. Once she had been dominating the group and talking on and on. Finding one Mr Mehta completely silent she suddenly turned on him “Why don't you talk?” “I can only do so Madame, if you will stop talking” was the honest reply.

With her traditional Parsee saris always worn in the Gujarati way she was fond of wearing rather incongruously Parsi velvet caps. A maroon one, richly embroidered in gold, her favourite and lucky cap she left to the Coopers as a memento. (The author was thrilled to be able to see and handle this personal and prized possession of Madame Cama). Always sentimental she had asked Mr Godrej to get her some photographs of her relatives. He got them but carelessly left them in a locker on a railway platform and she was much upset at this loss.

The picture that emerges from the recollections of a Parsee lady, Mrs Bani Batlibhoy, who had met Madame Cama in Vichy in 1930 is that of a kind, God-fearing, religious minded and deeply sentimental lady. Mrs Batlibhoy, her husband and daughter were sitting at a restaurant table in a sidewalk cafe. Both ladies had worn traditional Parsee saris. An elderly lady walked up to them and spoke in Gujarati; “Welcome

children,” and asked if they were from Bombay. Seeing their surprise she introduced herself and said she lived in Paris but had come to Vichy for a few days. When she heard their names, she impulsively embraced all three of them publicly. “Why do you feel shy, it is our Indian way of greeting and we are relatives also”, she said, sensing their embarrassment. She invited them home to tea and they gladly accepted. Then she reprimanded them, “You have accepted but haven’t even asked my address. Are you going to search in the whole of Vichy for me? Take out pencil and paper and write it down”.

When, after a few days the Batlibhoys went to see her, they took a bunch of multicoloured dahlias. Seeing the lovely flowers there were tears in her fading eyes. Sentimentally, she remarked, “I had lovely flowers in my Bombay garden and seeing these I remember.” Was this the same revolutionary firebrand of blood and violence—a sentimental old lady reduced to tears of remembrance by a bunch of flowers!

She had resided abroad nearly thirty five years but still read the newspapers of her native Bombay, the Gujarati ‘Jame-Jamshed’ and ‘Kaiser-i-Hind’ to keep in touch with her homeland. Every week she would call over Indian students. A boy in one such group had kept silent when they conversed in Gujarati. When she asked him why, he said he had forgotten Gujarati. “How sad — in a mere eight or ten months you have forgotten. I will have to write to your parents. What is the use of their spending so much money on you when your memory is so weak and they should recall you.” She was only joking, but the poor chap suddenly remembered his Gujarati — fearing she would carry out her threat.

Mrs Batlibhoy mentions her generosity when they got up to leave. Madame Cama presented her daughter a beautiful Chinese border—embroidered in *zari*—precious even in those



days, an heirloom now. After many years they were to meet again when they went to see her in the Parsi General Hospital and presented her a handknitted shawl which she—old and infirm by then — gratefully accepted. In hospital it seems, she had asked for reading material. The sisters feeling that she would know only English perhaps, brought papers accordingly, but what she had wanted were her ‘Jame’ and ‘Kaiser’, so that she would get news of her people. Such love of homeland and language she had retained!

Madame Cama was a rebel throughout her life. Spirited and self-willed even as a child, as a young woman she was hot headed and of independent views. What Arthur Symons said of Sarojini Naidu could apply to her also: “A spirit of too much fire in too frail a body.” For she was to be plagued by illnesses and with the stresses and strains of revolutionary life her health broke down repeatedly. Her body was never without suffering but there was a crusading element in her spirit which would not let her rest and which got her freedom. Her fanatical zeal represented the violent aspect of revolution. In Madame Cama there was not the faintest trace of inferiority complex as many an Indian in those days had in the presence of the white foreigner. She was outspoken and fearless, her co-workers were enamoured of her enthusiasm and courage, and also her impulsively bold utterances. With her ebullient optimism she faced each storm with fearless zest and a soaring confidence which had made her announce to an American reporter that she hoped to see India independent in ten years.

Almost childlike in her simplicity, when she spoke she thundered with the fire and fury of a veteran revolutionary. She made it a point to speak in Hindustani whenever possible and left a lasting impression on the minds of those who heard her.



“Why don’t you go back to India dear?” a close friend had asked her. She had been talking eagerly of her relatives in India and he had sensed her homesickness. “Because the British want me to give them a written apology for my past misdeeds and a guarantee that I will take no more any part in politics,” she had answered. “Can’t you do that? Now you are too old for politics.” “Never”, she replied vehemently and angrily, “I am never too old for politics. I’d like very much to address political meetings all over India.” Though this longing of hers was never to be fulfilled, it shows her indomitable spirit and her obstinacy.

She once told Harin Chattopadhyaya: “Many people ask me why I do not return to India. Why, loving India as I do, I do not spend my life in her bosom. They do not believe that those of us who are working abroad can still love and ache for the country in which we were born and nurtured and given breath. I will tell you, Harin,” she halted for a moment, then continued: “Listen, I have taken an oath never to go back to India on a foreign passport. Why should I?”<sup>1</sup>

British Intelligence reports that ‘Bande Mataram’ was extremely violent and revolutionary and Madame Cama was a bitter enemy of British rule in India and “there can be no doubt that though not of conspicuous ability yet she made it up by the strength of her convictions”. Not of conspicuous ability? Certainly she did not possess the poetic or flawless oratory of Sarojini Naidu or Annie Besant but she made it up by the deep sincerity that shone through her words. Some of her writings are memorable for their logical thinking. A keen student of political problems she was perceptive enough to grasp the significance of the Russian Revolution and the role

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1. *Kaiser-i-Hind*, August 23, 1936

of Lenin. The British themselves were to say “Indian independence is not a wide enough field for her—war-cry is ‘the Orient for the Orientals’.” She was not only a Nationalist but even an Internationalist as her fields widened. A practical capable woman also in many ways, her resourcefulness and organisational skills are seen in the way she managed to get printed and despatched revolutionary literature and even smuggled in arms to aid revolutionaries in India. Whatever she did, she did with efficient thoroughness. In money matters too she showed her mettle, being not only financially independent but capable of handling her own finances. With valuable advice and guidance from business friends she invested her money wisely, so that even when the British Government deprived her of the income from her Trust money, she could manage. It was only due to circumstances beyond her control, when she lost her shares in the war years, that she was hard up.

It was her task to handle finances and accounts for the revolutionaries. In 1910 the ‘National Fund’ was established in Paris, of which Madame Cama and Chattopadhyaya were treasurers. In 1912, Madame Cama wrote to Rana, asking him for money due for February and March numbers of ‘Bande Mataram’ expressing the hope that he ‘would continue to pay 100 francs a month regularly in future as she had to send V.V.S. Aiyar and Freeman (on the staff of ‘Gaelic American’) 100 francs a month. In July 1912, copies were obtained (by British Intelligence) in Madame Cama’s own handwriting which threw considerable light on the accounts of the revolutionary party. A letter written by Madame Cama to Rana on July 13, 1912 shows her sagacity and foresight :

“You have given me a receipt for 6000 francs that is useless, because you have written it as if it was my own money and at my death, my legal heirs will be able to take

this money, or while I am still alive my husband would be able to raise objections. On this account please give me a receipt in the name of Abhinav Bharat Society in the same way as you gave me a former receipt for 7500. Write this one in the same way because at the time of writing that we showed it to Longuet and it was according to law”.<sup>1</sup>

Bhikhaiji, was brave to the point of foolhardiness. In her friend Acharya’s words “Madame Cama was like a child who does not care to know what playing with fire means, so reckless was she.”<sup>2</sup> Outspoken and straightforward she was devoid of any artifice or roundabout ways. To her, character in a person was more important than learning. There was no artifice in her words—she spoke and she wrote straight from the heart. Forthright in her speaking and writing she could not only enthrall but also shock and use severe words as when she referred to Morley as a two faced snake.

Adi K. Sett while in Paris had once called on Bhikhaiji, together with Leelamani, daughter of the famous Sarojini Naidu. Bhikhaiji knew Sarojini and Leelamani had heard of her through her mother. Among various topics the conversation turned to the beautiful Mrs Jinnah, a great friend of Leelamani and her mother. Mrs Jinnah it seems had called on Bhikhaiji and just to amuse her had told her that she had been to a night club with a Marquis, that the Marquis had had a bit too much to drink and had dashed his car against some object. Madame Cama had not been amused. She recounted to them how angry she was with Mrs Jinnah and how she had scolded her: “When such a remarkable man had married you, how could you go to a nightclub with a tipsy man?” Only Bhickoo could have ticked off Mrs Jinnah with such spirit—

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1. *Political Files*, 1913; National Archives, Delhi

2. *Mahratta*, August 12, 1938



no one else would have dared. And it is doubtful if the aristocratic Mrs Jinnah would have accepted such a stricture and scolding from anyone else.

The classic example of her courage at the time of the Nasik Murder Trial is vividly described by Dr Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya in his Bengali book 'Europay Bharatiya Biplaber Sadhna':

Savarkar was one of the accused at the Nasik murder trial at Bombay. Madame Cama employed Baptista, a barrister at law of Bombay to defend Savarkar. She sent money to Mr Vaughan, Savarkar's solicitor in London and told him to send all the papers to Mr Baptista. During the course of the trial, Chhatrabhuj Amin turned approver and narrated how he had brought a Browning revolver from Rana's house in Paris to Bombay. As soon as Madame Cama learnt about this she realized that it was an attempt to involve Sardar Singh Rana and Savarkar himself would be in further danger. She became restless to save these two leaders of the Indian independence movement. Without consulting any of her colleagues she arrived at the office of the British Consul General, who after receiving her card, came to meet her at the door. He was possibly happy in the hope that this brave Indian revolutionary lady had come to surrender herself and now the history of five years of revolutionary activities would be revealed.

After seating herself, Madame Cama said, "I have come to tell you the story of the notorious Browning revolver. It is true that the box was in Sardar Rana's house but he know nothing about it, neither did Savarkar. I collected the revolvers and kept them in the box. I sent the revolvers to Bombay with the help of Chhaturbhuj Amin. The entire responsibility for those revolvers is mine and I am guilty."

The Consul was astonished. He recorded the statement of Madame Cama and gave her a receipt. Returning home, Madame Cama sent a copy of her statement to Baptista in Bombay but no warrant was issued in the name of Madame Cama or Rana. Perhaps due to the international complication which had arisen in connection with Savarkar's escape attempt the British politicians did not dare to proceed further. Nothing brought out the fact of her deep abiding loyalty to her friends than the way in which, even after their paths had irrevocably separated, their joint dreams shattered, she stood by Savarkar and his family. When he had been hounded out of England after the Dhingra episode she had helped him regain his shattered health. When Har Dayal lived in England in the direst poverty according to Madame Cama on "no more than six pence a day" and this life style she said had "rendered him neurasthenic", his friends in Paris had persuaded him to join them, offering care and devotion until he regained his strength. It was Madame Cama who bore most of the brunt of this 'care'.

At the time Madame Cama was campaigning ceaselessly to galvanize public opinion to secure the release of Savarkar, "Despite her age and illness, she personally sometimes accompanied by myself," Pavlovich wrote, "visited the newspaper offices and requested them to incorporate some notes on Savarkar".

Savarkar's letters from the Andamans to his brother Narayanrao published in 'Echoes from Andamans' reveal how deeply impressed he was by the loyalty of Madame Cama. In a letter dated 9.3.1915 he wrote

"I was very much afraid that owing to the invasion of France you would be unable to hear from Madame Cama—who had been ever since my coming here a second mother to you and who had so nobly and so

faithfully stood by us in the darkest hour of our life. But I was very glad to be assured that she, even in the midst of this world-hubbub, remembered you and had regularly been sending letters to you. At the touch of one such faithful, noble, unshaken loving hand, one's heart recovers its belief in Humanity—belief rudely shaken by the disappearance of the closest and by the treachery of the truest and by the indifference of the dearest. It is a pity I cannot write to the dear lady and tell her how I esteem her noble life and her solicitude for the needy and the distressed—and love, and long to see her once more; but as it is please to give her all my esteem and respects before you give them to any of our relatives: for what wonder they do something for us? Wonder is how she does and does so much.” (p. 18)

In a letter dated 6.7.1916 he wrote:

“All my best wishes for him and my dear and very esteemed Madame Cama! She must have suffered a lot of worry owing to the War! Give her my best and freshest love and tell her that those whom I saw in Paris while I was with her then, are even foremost in my memory—especially the Sannyasin!” (p. 27)

Another letter dated 5.8.1917 reads:

“Nothing could match the ideal constancy of affection of our dear Madame Cama. Even the war has not made her forget you! Thus it is that many a time the blood is *not* thicker than choice and there are affections which noble hearts alone can know of which neither the lack of blood nor of interest can cool and which growing up in an ideal land flourish and are nursed on



forces so subtle that the everyday and matter of fact world fails to see or comprehend.” (p. 32)

On 4-8-1918 he wrote:

“Please to give my reverence and love to my dear Madame Cama. Hope she takes care of her health. How awful for her to pass her days in exile when she should have thought of passing them attuned to the music of sweet smiling children?” (p. 42)

Another admirable facet of her personality was her habit of always putting a charitable interpretation on the behaviour of others. Allowed to return to Paris after the War she went back to the old pension. For over 30 years, she had stayed in the same place at Rue de Ponthieu, a parallel street to the Champs Elysees, transferred from one proprietress to another as almost part of the inventory, till ultimately forced to vacate as the building was to be pulled down. One of the landladies was a veritable vampire fleecing her, checking on the funds Madame Cama received and tallying up her bill on that amount. Yet every morning when the two ladies met it was an eager embrace and “Ah! ma chère” (Oh! my dear) in affectionate greeting. A sincere friend seeing Madame Cama feeling flitched of her income asked why she persisted with that hypocritical landlady. This was the incredible answer:

“I came to Paris on my own accord and the French did not invite me. So they have every right to charge me what they like. What business have I to complain when I force myself upon them as guest”.

She did not consider herself or resent being cheated and in her trusting simplicity did not realize that the affectionate ‘Ah! ma chère’ landlady only considered her an old fool who could be made to pay anything.

There was a deeply sensitive affectionate side to her nature. Her attachment to her family persisted to the end. Though most of her own relatives had practically disowned her— out of fear perhaps— she remembered them and asked after them. Upto 1907 whenever her brother Ardeshir Patel, a rich bachelor came to France, sister and brother stayed together as her letter of February 12, 1907 to Dadābhai Naoroji from Hotel St. Petersbourg, 51, Promenade des Anglais, Nice, indicates:

“It is very cold in Paris till May so I do not intend going back till then. I am here with my brother but he is going to Bombay soon and I will be going to some quieter and less expensive place here called Hyeres to live in a family.”<sup>1</sup>

Obviously when he footed the bill she could live in luxury, not otherwise. But later, disapproving of her politics he disinherited her, though he left enormous sums to charity and lavish amounts to all his nephews and nieces and even a small annuity would have been a great help to her. But fate plays cunning tricks on mortals. Ardeshir had to depend on Bhikhaiji when he lay dying in Paris and she faithfully nursed him. She had forgotten and forgiven and she used to say to friends with deep emotion, “He died in my arms !”

She was greatly impressed by Russian literature, Maxim Gorky being her favourite. She liked very much, his ‘Song of the Falcon’, a hymn to the Frenzy of the Brave and when Pavlovich first translated it into French for her and read it out, she could hardly contain her excitement and emotion and close to tears exclaimed, “This is better than any article”.

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1. Political Files, 1913; National Archives, Delhi

Madame Cama was completely free from any regional or parochial feeling or communal bias. All religions were equal to her, her whole country was her home and all its people were her kinsfolk, India was for all Indians, irrespective of caste, colour or creed and in the days when women hardly took part in public life, she worked shoulder to shoulder with men for her dream—the freedom and unity of her country. Amazingly with her cosmopolitan outlook and background of English education she appreciated Indian culture and values. “No English Oak”, she was to thunder, “is wanted in India. We have our own noble Banyan tree and our beautiful lotus flower. We do not want to imitate British civilization. No Sir, we have our own which is nobler and higher”.

Another strong belief was in the equality of men and women and an awareness of the role women could play in the struggle for freedom and social change. When, addressing a meeting of the National Conference in Egypt in 1910 attended by men alone, she promptly demanded to know “Where is the other half of Egypt?” and continued:

“I see only the representatives of one half of Egypt. The assembly is full of only men. Sons of Egypt, where are your Mothers? Where are your Sisters? Do not forget that the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that shapes the individual that moulds the character. That soft hand is the Chief factor in the national life. Do not neglect that powerful hand.”<sup>1</sup>

In Oriental Clubs and societies even among those where the veil was compulsory she was welcomed and admired. The Egyptian youth looked upto her with awe and reverence, sought her advise. If she a woman, could be a revolutionary, how could they lag behind!

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1. *Mahratta*, August 12, 1938



But age, which spares no one, was creeping in upon her with its infirmities and problems. Her skull had been cracked in a motor car accident and she had an operation after it, she had undergone a cataract operation and later, her face was paralysed. She suffered haemorrhages and was getting infirm. She bore all her troubles with stoicism, so much so that friends wondered at the vitality and will power with which she was able to overcome such afflictions, but she could not resist an irresistible longing to see once again, the land of her birth.

The old familiar *pension* had been demolished; her eyesight was fading. Financially she had lost enormously in shares she owned. She was expecting death as a deliverance because she had an attack of paralysis. But the flag had to be kept aloft—the struggle had to go on. Calling Mahdev Rao to her bedside she handed over to him her precious flag. Acharya who was with her during those last days in Paris would sometimes help her to walk the Champs Elysees past the cafes she had frequented for years and where people knew her well. Many eyes would turn to watch the pathetic sight—an old lady, almost a cripple, with paralysed face, utter carelessness of dress, supported by a younger man. Few could have seen in her the firebrand revolutionary of yore.

Adi K. Sett has given a vivid picture of the aged Madame Cama and mentions a memory which had remained fresh in his mind. He had asked Bhickoo out and she gladly came.

She never wore a proper sari or a frock but a big cloak which had the appearance of a dressing gown and flat heeled shoes. On her head would be perched a small hat, very modest in design, certainly not a fashionable French ‘chapeau’. She wore dark glasses, having had an operation for cataract... . Over Vermouth at the hotel lounge, she took off her hat and much to my amazement as well as those of the others there

was a Parsee velvet cap on her head evidently secreted under the unassuming bonnet. She entered the restaurant like that—Parsi velvet cap, dark glasses and her robe! She was quite oblivious of the amused interest she was creating. She ate everything except beef. She had no fads about food.

And years later, after Bhikhaiji had returned to India, old and very sick, he went to see her in hospital and found her very feeble but her mental faculties were still quite sharp. He was then Honorary Personal Assistant to the Devan of Mysore, so when she took his hands in hers she promptly inquired:

“Are you happy doing what you are? I hear you run around with Maharajas and belted knights,” and with a flash of her old spirit admonished, “Well, very soon you’ll be one of them!” “Which?” he asked, bending over her bed, “A Maharaja or a Knight”, but she had lapsed into feebleness again and did not catch the joke.

Yes, she was back in her beloved Motherland. For knowing her deteriorating health and conscious of her nostalgia, influential Paris friends had finally prevailed on the British Government to let her go back to her homeland. But that homeland, still under British rule had no place for her, her countrymen had no time for her. She had returned to an ungrateful, unfriendly atmosphere. This must have pained her deeply but she never complained.

She had not expected gratitude and applause. Throughout her life she had been unassuming, after all she felt she was only doing what she considered was her bounden duty to her Motherland. Years after her death when the government of independent India honoured her by issuing a stamp bearing her effigy a close friend was to remark that had she been alive her only comment would have been “What a fuss. And whatever for!”

## Assessment of the Revolutionaries

REVOLUTIONARY ACTIVITIES in India and abroad form an integral but rather neglected phase of India's freedom struggle. The first two decades of the twentieth century brought to the fore a surge of violence, of conspiracies and secret societies committed to the overthrow of the British Government in India by every possible means. The violence of their acts and the ethics of their methods have come in for carping criticism, even outright condemnation. Historians of our freedom struggle have denied these revolutionaries the recognition they deserve ignoring them and belittling their role, or condemning outright their means and methods, but fighting shy of an effort to understand them and evaluate dispassionately their very genuine contribution to their Motherland. The common man is left with conflicting, often erroneous and vague notions about the revolutionaries—a vagueness intensified by the fact that working in secret, the revolutionaries perforce left scant personal records of their work. British police and Intelligence kept a constant vigilant eye on their activities and reported on them in accounts like 'The Sedition Committee Reports' and 'Terrorism in India', but these one-sided often rather colourful records cannot be taken as the whole truth, being biased and far from impartial.

One important fact in the revolutionaries' favour often tends to get overlooked that their cult of violence was only a logical and inevitable sequel to the British policy of exploitation and repression. The famines, epidemics, impoverishment and the resentments which this policy brought in its wake, added



fuel to the fire. The Partition of Bengal provided the tinder which caused it to burst into flames. We would be fully justified in calling this new cult 'militant nationalism' rather than 'terrorism'. The terms 'anarchists' and 'terrorists' applied to them by the British Government fail to convey the true spirit of the new movement. After all the origin of the militant nationalism of Bengal—of which the revolutionaries were an offshoot—was initially inspired by the ardent patriotism popularized by Swami Vivekananda and the religious devotion to the Motherland preached by Bankim Chandra through his 'Anandamath'. Beginning with concentration on drill, gymnastics and physical training to strengthen an emasculated nation, the revolutionaries progressed to secret societies and took to activities with firearms and bombs, under the inspiring influence of the successful revolutions in Italy, Russia and Ireland.

The revolutionaries advocated all possible means, violent and non-violent for the attainment of freedom, but they sincerely believed that violence was being forced upon them as a necessary evil by the attitude and actions of the British. As a well organized, open, armed rebellion against the mighty British Power was way beyond their meagre means and capacity, the only way open to them was of secret, violent sporadic actions and preparations for an ultimate widespread revolt (even with the aid of England's enemies if and when available). The examples of Italy, Russia and Ireland inspired them, the victory of Japan over Russia enthused them. British arrogance and repression provided a further impetus and incitement to violence. They implicitly believed however in violence not as an end in itself, but only the means to a noble end.

When Gandhiji criticized their philosophy as 'dangerous' Savarkar, undisputed leader of the revolutionaries in Europe said in defence<sup>1</sup>:

“We feel no special love for secret organisations or surprise or secret warfare. We hold that whenever the open preaching and practicing of truth is banned by enthroned violence, then alone secret societies and secret warfare are justified as the inevitable and indispensable means to combat violence by force. Whenever the natural process of national and political evolution is violently suppressed by the forces of wrong, then revolution must step in as a natural reaction and therefore ought to be welcomed as the only effective instrument to re-enthroner Truth and Right. You rule by bayonets, and under these circumstances it is a mockery to talk of constitutional agitation when no constitution exists at all.”

About British repressive policy culminating in the Partition of Bengal, its aftermath and effects let us hear what a budding lawyer of the day had to say. It was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, as yet unknown to name and fame, who was to write in 1908<sup>2</sup>:

“The real awakening of India took place after the Partition of Bengal”, and was shrewd enough to prophesy that “that day may be considered to be the day of the partition of the British Empire .... As time passes the Nation is being forged.”

He went on to say, “Hitherto we have considered that for redress of grievances we must approach the throne”. But in his view, after the Partition people realized that petitions must be backed up by force and that the people must be ready to suffer for the cause. He explained the characteristics of the

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1. Harindra Srivastava: *Five Stormy Years, Savarkar in London*, p. 127
  2. *Struggle For Freedom* (edited by R.C. Majumdar) Vol XI, p. 61

new defiant spirit as the shedding of fear for the British or for imprisonment and the inauguration of the Swadeshi Movement. "That spirit", he added "was seen in the outspoken writings in the Press. That which people said tremblingly and in secret, began to be written publicly. No longer was an English face to awe them, imprisonment held no fears for them".

That spirit, generated in Bengal had spread all over India.

Save in the methods they resorted to, it is difficult to distinguish the revolutionaries from these new nationalists, Gandhiji is referring to. Both groups shared the same essential fundamental ideas, but while nationalists set store by Passive Resistance and other organised forms of defiant self-assertion the Extreme Left School having lost faith in such methods and activities had accepted armed resistance as the only feasible way.

The memorable words of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya about the prisoners of the Lahore Conspiracy Case could aptly apply to the majority of the revolutionaries:

"They are not ordinary criminals. They are persons who however much one may condemn any act of violence of which they might be proved guilty are persons who were not prompted by any selfish motive. They are, everyone of them, persons who are inspired by a high sense of patriotism and a burning desire for the freedom of their country."

Contrary to the widespread notion of the revolutionaries as assassins, murderers and dacoits', R.C. Mazumdar describes in even more eloquent words the true nature and life; and the achievement of these patriots: "Like the wandering ascetics of old, these young men willingly foresook all that was near and



dear to them, to carry on a lifelong struggle for the goal. Fear of death and physical suffering worse than death did not deter them, obstacles and difficulties like Himalayan barriers could not deflect them from their cause. Deserted by friends and relatives, ignored if not derided by their countrymen, without means or resources to keep their body and soul together, hounded by spies and hunted by police, flying from one shelter to another, these young men carried on a heroic but helpless struggle from day to day, from month to month and from year to year. They chose the life of hardships and privations and consecrated their lives to the service of their country. Many of them rushed headlong to destruction. They died in order that others might live. One may call them emotional, unreasonable and unrealistic. But nobody can doubt either the depth of their feelings or the sincerity of their faith.<sup>1</sup>

He goes on to say:

No age or country has produced martyrs of this type in large numbers for the people at large, fight shy of the extreme path and keep aloof.<sup>2</sup>

As for the effectiveness of their actions:

It galvanised the political consciousness of the country in a way that nothing else could, and left a deep imprint upon all the subsequent stages of our political advance... posterity will not grudge them the laurels due to the pioneers of the fight for freedom in India. Even today when we think of the true national movement for

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1 to 2. The History and Culture of the Indian People—Struggle for Freedom  
Vol XI edited by R.C. Majumdar, pp. 72-73

3. *ibid*

4. R.C. Majumdar: History of the Freedom Movement in India,  
Vol. II, p. 486

freedom, our minds fly back, at one leap, clear over half a century, to those who conceived of their country as 'Mother Goddess' and worshipped her with the offerings of their own lives.<sup>1</sup>

The terrorist methods preached and practiced by the Indian revolutionaries have evoked considerable criticism, even outright condemnation. Their actions are dismissed even on sheer practical grounds as useless and a waste of time and effort and precious human lives. Could the revolutionaries have been so foolish, so utterly unrealistic as to believe that their isolated terrorist attacks with bombs, and their murders of a few officials, would succeed in driving the British out of India? To this charge way back in 1908, Barindra Ghosh himself had already given a befitting reply:

"Your sermon is lost labour. We did not mean or expect to liberate our country by killing a few Englishmen. We wanted to show people how to dare and die."<sup>2</sup>

In this limited aim, they undoubtedly succeeded. They aroused a fearless spirit of defiance and obliterated the fear and dread of the rulers, from the minds of the ruled.

But it is on moral and ethical grounds that the more vociferous condemnations are based. Political dacoities, murder of officials, attempts at armed uprisings, it is argued are crimes by the norms of any civilized nation. Here we are treading on dangerous controversial ground, and to come to a definite pragmatic conclusion on this subject is not possible. To lay down ethical principles or guidelines in respect of terrorism, for and against, may best be left to moral philosophers. But one may consider impartially some of the relevant facts and views basing our judgement upon logical reasoning rather than mere sentiment. In western countries all political assassinations are not condemned outright. Some are not only condoned but

even eulogized and immortalised. We have it on the authority of the British poet, Mathew Arnold that the deeds of assassination of the Indian revolutionaries cannot be classified and condemned as 'murders'.

Murder; but what is murder? When a wretch  
For private gain or hatred takes a life,  
We call it murder, crush him, brand his name.  
But when, for some great public cause an arm  
Is, without love or hate, austere raised  
Against a power exempt from common checks;  
Dangerous to all, to be thus annul'd—  
Ranks any man with murder such an act?  
With grievous deeds, perhaps; with murder not.

It is a curious fact of European history that in most instances of political assassinations, the successful 'murderers' have been hailed as heroes; those who were caught in the deed and executed, glorified as martyrs—seldom have any been branded as criminals. This attitude seems embedded in the cultural tradition of Europe itself. As far back as in 514 B.C. in ancient Athens Harmodius and Aristogeiton plotted against and struck down the tyrants Hippias and Hipparchus, laying down their own lives in the process, they were glorified as martyrs of liberty and their deed celebrated in statue and song. The Italian leader Mazzini, inspirer of many a revolutionary all over the world held in highest esteem everywhere, had not hesitated to employ all the weapons of conspiracy including assassination, yet he did not stand condemned. Many a continental terrorist was admired and praised by Englishmen; while Irish terrorists evoked sympathy and support in Europe and America.

It must be said to their credit that even some distinguished Englishmen, at the time of the assassination of Lt. Col. Sir Curzon Wylie by Madanlal Dhingra in London on July 1, 1909



moved by Dhingra's last words, did not hesitate to express appreciation for the epic patriotism of this Indian terrorist. When Llyod George expressed to Winston Churchill his highest admiration for Dhingra's attitude as a patriot, Churchill shared the same view and commented that "Dhingra's last words were the finest ever made in the name of patriotism" and the two compared him with Plutarch's immortal heroes.<sup>1</sup>

The Indian revolutionaries considered themselves in a state of war against the British and justified their actions on the ground that in such an unequal war, lacking the resources for open battle they had to use these secret tactics. Their 'warfare' was not far removed from the tactics of 'Guerilla' warfare accepted and condoned by so called civilized society. And who is to decide whether, morally and ethically to rob a few houses and kill a few officials is more sinful, or less sinful than razing cities to the ground and killing innocent thousands in the name of modern warfare? (even for a just cause) As to whether terrorism is good or bad, justifiable or not, countless arguments can be advanced on either side. But there was no basic difference between the Indian variety of terrorism and the European forms of it. It is only right therefore to point out that those who condone and even glorify the revolutionaries of Europe, have no right to denounce their Indian counterparts—after all the Indians had borrowed their methods from these self-same revolutionaries of Italy, Ireland and Russia whom the world did not so condemn.

The Indian revolutionary movement abroad, with which Madame Cama was so prominently associated, was initially both anti-British and anti-Congress. Started by Shyamji Krishnavarma, it was to make giant strides under Savarkar.

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1. W.S. Blunt: *My Diaries* Part II, p. 288

Later the policy of individual terrorist acts was abandoned in favour of a more ambitious policy of an armed revolt; preparations for this were made at the various centres of a world-wide revolutionary network. Under the guidance of revolutionaries from Paris and London, Indian immigrants in the United States and Canada were forged into a well-knit organisation. The Ghadr Party combined patriotic fervour with considerable strength, both in numbers and organisational skills. During the war it was to attempt the overthrow of British power in India by aiding the revolutionaries within the country, while revolutionaries on the Continent were to ally themselves with the Germans on the assumption that England's difficulty was India's opportunity.

But these widespread and ceaseless efforts of the Indian revolutionaries failed to achieve their aim. It was a virtually impossible task they had undertaken; the strength of the contenders being so unequal. Patriotism, initiative and sheer 'guts', they had in ample measure, but their planning and co-ordination left much to be desired. The vigilance of British Intelligence (whose agents were often planted among them) thwarted many a plan; the attitude of loyalty of constitutional minded Indian leaders to the British during the war, handicapped them further, while traitors and turncoats within their own ranks, stabbed them in the back. (The schemes devised by the Indian revolutionaries were potentially very dangerous, but, most did not materialize because British Intelligence got scent of them before they could be carried out).

Indian revolutionary activities abroad slackened after the war. Disheartened by failure of earlier schemes, they splintered into various groups with varying ideas and ideologies. In India itself with the emergence of Gandhi and the dawn of the era of non-violence, they inevitably faded out from the scene.

Undoubtedly, the Indian revolutionaries failed in their objective but their movement jolted the British Empire out of its complacency, and left an important and lasting impact on Indian politics. In 'Struggle for Freedom,' Chapter VIII, in General Review (VI) p. 232, Majumdar states:

“It gave rise to that fearless spirit of defiance and resistance against the dread of British power and prestige which has formed the foundation of all subsequent revolutionary activities, including the non-violent satyagraha of Mahatma Gandhi”.

As such it is not correct to ignore or minimize the role of the revolutionaries, or deny them credit for their valuable contribution to the freedom struggle.

They certainly deserve admiration for creating and maintaining in the face of overwhelming odds, a far flung network of revolutionary organisations not only in different parts of our vast sub-continent, but across the distant seas in Europe, America and various parts of Asia. Also for their ceaseless efforts to acquaint the world with the true conditions of India under British rule, counteracting the false British propaganda, and for creating an awareness of the political aspirations of the Indian people. They won world-wide sympathy and support for India's cause. Innumerable publications conveyed the message of Revolutionary Nationalism, to people in India and abroad—'Indian Socialist' from London, 'Bande Mataram' from Geneva, 'Ghadr' from America, 'The Free Hindustan' from Vancouver, the 'Talwar' from Berlin and 'The Islamic Fraternity' from Japan. The British government records reveal their awareness and fears that the agitation in India was being encouraged by the inflammatory literature smuggled in from abroad.

This propaganda mission of the revolutionaries fulfilled its aim and bore far-reaching consequences. This can be judged



from the fact that no less an authority than the Kaiser clearly said in his frank reply to President Wilson that absolute political independence for India was an essential prerequisite for world peace.

Before the advent of the revolutionaries on the scene, political work in India was regarded as a part-time occupation for leisure hours, of venerable men, successful in their own different professional fields. The revolutionaries however, both leaders and the majority of followers, devoted their full time and entire lives to the service of the Motherland. Because of the secrecy of their activities, the emotional compensation of name and fame were denied them. They did not work in or for any limelight, hence their sacrifice was nobler.

It is the work of the revolutionary that was responsible for the concessions and so-called reforms of the British Government from time to time. Their actions made the British realize that mere repression could defeat its own ends and compelled them to try and win over the Moderates. If we study the process of the gradual transfer of power and the timings of the reforms by which it was effected, it becomes clear that at each step it was the Congress which reaped the benefits, though the revolutionaries had forced the government to yield. The Morley Minto reforms came in 1909. They were preceded by the rise of Extremists in Indian politics after the Partition of Bengal. The Montague-Chelmsford Reforms in 1919 came in the wake of widespread revolutionary activities during the First World War in India and abroad. The simmering unrest was brought to boiling point by the Rowlatt Bills under which judges could try political cases without juries and even the possession of seditious documents was a criminal offence. The holding of meetings was prohibited but in the speed of events many people were ignorant of this. A huge concourse of twenty thousand people had gathered at Jallianwala Bagh

in Amritsar to protest against the Rowlatt Act. The ground was surrounded by a high wall and there was only one narrow point for entry and exit— General Dyer fired upon the crowd without warning— hundreds of people were killed, thousands injured. A wave of shock affected the whole of India, a shock of brutal reality which made people realise that the country's freedom and liberty was no longer something they could bargain for; it was something they would have to fight for and die for.

On July 15, 1920 Gandhiji had received a letter:

“It is vain to expect justice from a race so blind and drunk with the arrogance of power, the bitter prejudice of race and creed and colour and betraying such an abysmal ignorance of Indian conditions, opinions, sentiments and aspirations”.<sup>1</sup>

Are these the words of Madame Cama and the revolutionaries? No—These strong words were from the mighty pen of Sarojini Naidu, for even that kindly humanist had realized the true nature of British rule. Madame Cama could well have told her “See, we told you so—we knew this all along.” Even Gandhiji was to term the British Government a ‘Satanic’ government and call for non-cooperation. After the Second World War, failure of the Cripps Mission and the activities of Subhash Chandra Bose, even the congress was driven to give the war-cry of ‘Do or Die’ and ‘Quit India’.

The work of Indian revolutionaries abroad was remarkable in that there was complete communal amity and men and women of different castes and creeds worked in harmony and unity for the common cause. The revolutionary movement was carried on a secular basis without the communal discords that were to prove the bane of the Motherland.

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1. Tara Ali Baig: *Sarojini Naidu*, p. 75

In their political goals the revolutionaries were many steps ahead of their contemporaries. When the dreams and aspirations of most Indian leaders were confined to 'Home Rule' it was these militant nationalists who called for an armed revolt for complete independence.

Why the revolutionaries resorted to violence has been most ably explained by Madame Cama, the Mother of the Revolution in 'Bande Mataram':

Three years ago it was repugnant to me even to talk of violence as a subject of discussion, but owing to the heartlessness, the hypocrisy, the rascality of the Liberals, that feeling is gone. Why should we deplore the use of violence when our enemies drive us to it? If we use force it is because we are forced to use force. How it is that the Russian Sophy Perovskai and her comrades are heroines and heroes in the eyes of Englishmen and Englishwomen while our countrymen are considered criminals for doing exactly the same thing, for the same cause. If violence is applauded in Russia, why not in India. Tyranny is tyranny and torture is torture where ever applied. Success justified any action. Struggle for freedom calls for exceptional measures. Successful rebellion against the foreign rule is Patriotism.<sup>1</sup>

Her Logic is irrefutable.

A most moving statement of the revolutionaries' views and of their heroic patriotism is contained in the statement made by Dhingra, the revolutionary martyr as he bravely faced the gallows—appropriately titled 'Challenge'<sup>1</sup>, it states:

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1. An excerpt from Bombay Police Commissioner's office file No. 321/H



“I admit, the other day I attempted to shed English blood as an humble revenge for the inhuman hangings and deportations of patriotic Indian youths. In this attempt I have consulted none but my own conscience; I have conspired with none but my own duty.

I believe that a nation held in bondage with the help of foreign bayonets is in perpetual state of war. Since open battle is rendered impossible to a disarmed race, I attacked by surprise; since guns were denied to me, I drew forth my pistol and fired.

As a Hindu, I feel that a wrong done to my country is an insult to God. Poor in health and intellect, a son like myself has nothing to offer to the Mother but his own blood and so I have sacrificed the same on her alter. Her cause is the cause of Shree Rama. Her services are the services of Shri Krishna. This War of Independence will continue between India and England so long as the Hindu and the English races last (if this present unnatural relation does not cease).

The only lesson required in India at present is to learn how to die and the only way to teach it is by dying ourselves. Therefore, I die, and glory in my martyrdom.

My only prayer to God is: May I be reborn of the same Mother and May I redie in the same sacred cause till the cause is succeeful and she stands free for the good of humanity and the glory of God.

Bande Mataram!”

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1. Harindra Srivastava: *Five Stormy Years—Savarkar in London* (June 1906-June 1911) pp. 168-9

## Unfulfilled Dreams

AFTER THIRTY-FIVE years of continuous exile, Madame Cama had become homesick; weighed down with age and illness she longed to return to India. But the British Government refused permission, until her influential Paris friends intervened. Though weak and aged, barely able to stand, walk or write, the government demanded a written guarantee from her that she would not hold any meetings or make speeches—a tribute to the terror she had inspired in them! Reluctantly, after much persuasion and with tears of humiliation she signed the guarantee—and came back to India, not to live but to die. Hardly had she landed in Bombay when she had to be rushed to the Parsee General Hospital where, after lingering for eight months, she quietly passed away on August 16, 1936, unhonoured and unmourned.

How can one fathom the feelings of this grand old lady, returning to her beloved homeland after three decades of selfless service in its cause, not to a warm and welcome home-coming but to the lonely impersonality of a hospital ward? The Parsee General Hospital however, with its high ceilinged rooms and tiled floors, is more reminiscent of a gracious old home than a hospital. Patients sit in the evenings in its long open corridors, gazing out on a well maintained central garden, huddled together here and there in a comradeship of pain and suffering. But, in those days, could they have still ostracized her? Pain and suffering are great levellers. She was only a pathetic old lady, and no more the firebrand revolutionary Madame Cama. But fear of British reprisals and

her reputation still persisted and prevented many perhaps, from befriending her. People like Barjorji Bharucha, Pervin Naoroji, Savarkar's brother and old Paris friends stood by her and looked after her. Her husband had not forgiven her though some relatives on the Cama side did visit her. As she was taken to her room, she must have seen the pictures of her prophet Zoroaster displayed prominently in so many places all over the hospital. She had not failed Him. She had lived according to the tenets of her faith, had fought against what she considered evil according to her beliefs and conscience. And, if "Happiness comes to him who seeks the happiness of others", she had toiled for what she considered would bring happiness and a new life to her poor and oppressed countrymen. As for her Prophet's commandment of "good thoughts; good words and good deeds", she realized that as far as Englishmen were concerned she had not fully obeyed it. She had not harboured good thoughts about them, spoken good words about them, or done deeds which would be considered 'good', by the standards of the world. This had been her blind spot, but they had certainly given her cause. Why should she be blamed when they themselves blatantly disobeyed the injunction of their own prophet Jesus, "the meek shall inherit the earth" and his commandment to "turn the other cheek". She was not ashamed or repentant; she did not believe she had done anything wrong. Courageous in life, she was not afraid to die.

She had blazed a pioneering trail on India's political scene entering it at a time when Jawaharlal Nehru was a schoolboy and Mahatma Gandhi as yet, an unknown lawyer. In days when even brave men were afraid to associate themselves openly with revolutionary activities, for the punishment was swift and severe, this fearless woman joined the revolutionary ranks abroad. Her career as a builder of modern India was to be carried on from far-off climes. For in India itself she



would have been promptly put behind bars and rendered ineffective.

She ceaselessly strove to inspire others with some of her own fiery enthusiasm. Her violent, often virulent oratory—‘rabid oratory’ the British were to call it— staggered audiences. With complete confidence in herself and unshakable faith in her cause, she addressed large gatherings, at a time when women, even in the west, were still struggling for equality. It was her dynamic personality, the shock of her words, the example of her own life making those words acceptable and heeded, that made her an effective leader. The fact of her being a woman helped. The presence of a woman revolutionary made a tremendous impact on our youths.

In India’s long fight for freedom, many women were destined to play a prominent part. The emergence of women in the national freedom struggle led to their easier transition to full participation in public life and acceptance even as national leaders. In England and in the west, the fight for women’s emancipation was amidst considerable male-female hostility. This competition of the sexes was fortunately, singularly absent in India. But even in this emergence of women in India’s politics she was one of the earliest. At a time when few Indian women were formally educated or worked outside the home and only an insignificant minority of them took part even in social and cultural movements, leave alone politics, Bhikhaiji was already in the forefront of the revolutionary struggle, fighting shoulder to shoulder with brother revolutionaries. When in 1912, Sarojini Naidu had addressed the historic session of the Muslim League, it was not so much her speech that was significant as the fact that she a woman, was addressing a meeting, almost wholly male. The election of Annie Besant as the first woman President of the Indian National Congress in 1917, marked the acceptance of women

as leaders. Women were to make their voice heard. Sarojini Naidu herself became the Congress President in 1925. But it is to the credit of Madame Cama that she was prominent in politics even earlier than her two famous country women. She had spoken at Stuttgart, and addressed gatherings in Europe and America, in 1907 and even earlier.

Madame Cama was a forerunner of the national movement and others took decades to catch up with her ideas. She was the first to raise the slogan of complete independence in a foreign forum, the first to realize the importance of a flag as a symbol of independent India and to raise the Indian tricolour. It was only many years later that Congress leaders were to advance officially the slogans raised by Madame Cama in the early years of this century and to adopt the National Flag. She was far ahead of her times and the significance of her contribution can be realized when it is remembered that it was only on December 31, 1929 at the Lahore session of the Indian National Congress that the tricolour was officially accepted and hoisted and the resolution for independence adopted. Madame Cama had done this in 1907, twenty-two years before the Lahore Congress.

When we analyse the work she did in her lifetime, we find that the importance of her contribution rests upon her speeches and writings, the breadth of her international vision, the example and inspiration of her own life. She had the rare gift of being able to inspire others to action, and with her ideals and sacrifices, spirited and sincere oratory, she galvanized the younger revolutionaries to work unitedly for the cause of the Motherland— she was not a born or inspired orator, but her frank lucid analysis of her country's ills, her idealism and passion imbibed others with direction and purpose.

Next only to her passionate desire for its freedom, was Madame Cama's strong belief in the unity of her country,



without the diversive barriers of communal or regional feelings. She understood profoundly that there would be no true freedom, until all citizens of India would work and live together as Indians. Sarojini Naidu's stirring words about herself could apply equally effectively to Madame Cama also:

“Having travelled, having conceived, having hoped, having enlarged my love, having widened my sympathies, having come into contact with different races, different communities, different religions, different civilizations, friends, my vision is clear. I have no prejudice of race, creed, caste or colour... Until you students have acquired and mastered that spirit of brotherhood, do not believe it possible that you will ever cease to be sectarian .... if I may use such a word .... that you will ever be national.”<sup>1</sup>

If the message of these two women had been heeded, our country would perhaps have been spared the narrow chauvinism, religiousism and provincialism exhibited by its people after independence in 1947.

Madame Cama had proclaimed, “My only hope in life is to see my country free and united”. She often harped on the need for brotherhood between Hindus and Muslims, making it clear that in this lay the only guarantee for the unity of India. Whether she addressed Hindus, Muslims, Christians or Sikhs the watchwords of this apostle of unity were “to fasten fast the ties of brotherhood”. It was her belief that the relations between her countrymen should be firm and resolute without bringing in the question of religion, caste and creed.

She was, and remained, an ardent nationalist. But as the horizons of her vision expanded, she realized the implications of India's freedom struggle in the wider context of anti-

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1. Tara Ali Baig: *Sarojini Naidu*, pp. 30-1



colonial struggles all over the world. Her realization of the need for a united anti-imperialist front made her look beyond India's struggle and led her to develop personal contacts and relations with various national liberation movements and their revolutionaries abroad. She understood the need for mutual relations and unity of all National liberation movements. In this unity would be the strength to defeat their common foe. She was fast developing a world outlook and becoming an Internationalist.

Madame Cama was the first Indian patriot to have faith in socialist ideals. She was not only the first Indian woman, but as a matter of fact the first Indian revolutionary to be inspired and impressed by Lenin. After Stuttgart, Lenin had made a reference to the Indian delegates of that Conference, without mentioning names. But it is evident that the first Indian to see Lenin and hear him speak, and to inform him through her speech about the misrule in India and efforts of Indian revolutionaries to overthrow it and probably the first Indian to speak to him personally was Madame Cama along with Sardar Singh Rana. She had understood the importance of the Russian Revolution, made a study of its methods and aims and realized early the significance of this new epoch in world history.

This unusual woman wielded considerable influence in the Socialist circles of Europe as was apparent, when she rallied the European Press to Savarkar's defence and managed to get the case referred to The Hague Tribunal. Practical enough to realize the true needs of her countrymen she helped build up the revolutionary movement in India with literature, arms and even bomb manuals smuggled in from abroad. Her decisiveness was another admirable characteristic. When she realized there was no alternative left, she took to violent methods calmly and with thoroughness though she had not been a born revolutionary and in her own words, only a few

years before, "It was repugnant to me even to talk about violence as a subject of discussion."

With all her remarkable and admirable qualities she had her shortcomings. She could be dogmatic, obstinate, even autocratic. It is often said in criticism that being a woman, she should have objected to violence, not advocated it. The best answer to this, as to why she resorted to violence, is given by Madame Cama herself.

"Why should we deplore the use of violence when our enemies drive us to it. If violence is applauded in Russia, why not in India? Successful rebellion against foreign rule is patriotism.

Was she only a theoretical propagandist as Shyamji Krishnavarma was accused of being, inflaming and instigating others from a safe haven? She had sent the guns; could she have pulled the trigger? She had helped to procure the bomb manual; but would she ever have thrown the bomb? We shall never know. But, in this connection her close friend M.P.T. Acharya has commented :

One might respect that she believed to be called upon to act like Joan of Arc, at an opportune time. Only her emotionalism was not so great as to make her one and she had no opportunity. But I doubt not that she would have laid down her life at a moment's notice if required .... enough foolhardy she was for the purpose.<sup>1</sup>

Considering the reckless bravery she showed in many other respects this assessment may be true. But another factor to consider besides her lack of opportunity is her age. She was already over forty when she joined the rebel ranks.

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1. Mahratta, August 12, 1938

Revolutionary recklessness leading to actual violent deeds, the actual pulling of the trigger, is generally though not always found among the youths.

It was only very belatedly, and many years after her death that the country woke up to some awareness of Madame Cama's contribution and the need to recognize it. In 1960, the birth centenary year of Madame Cama, the All India women's Conference paid homage to her as "One of India's earliest revolutionary fighters for freedom who gave us the first National Flag, who had to leave her home, family and land of her birth to be a refugee in foreign countries on account of her nationalist activities" and urged the Government of India to take suitable steps to commemorate her memory.

A Resolution was passed by the Greater Bombay Municipal Corporation as under:

The Corporation notes with pride the historic role of Madame Bhikhaiji Cama in the freedom struggle of our country at the beginning of the current century and the fact that not only did she struggle and suffer exile for the cause of freedom, but was one of the few pioneers of Indian Nationalism and the first Indian Woman of modern times to visualize a free and united republic of India with Hindi as a common language and a common script and the first Indian revolutionary to give India the first National Flag which was unfurled in August 1907 at the World Socialist Congress held at Stuttgart, in Germany. The Corporation in order to commemorate the achievements of this great patriot and grand lady of India and to mark the occasion on her birth centenary which falls on September 24, 1961, requests the Works Committee to consider the desirability of renaming Wodehouse Road or any other suitable main road as Madame Cama Road.



This resolution was only implemented again belatedly—on January 26, 1962 on Republic Day when the Maharashtra Sachivalya Road was named as Madame Cama Road. A commemorative stamp with the effigy was also issued on the same day. All India celebrations were held at Delhi where Prime Minister Indira Gandhi presided and at Bombay, and in Poona a portrait of her was put up at Veer Savarkar Hall. Delhi too now has a complex named after her, Bhikhaiji Cama Place.

C.R. Rajagopalacharya has written in his incisive way, “I am one of the age group in politics who are fully aware of the brave, tenacious part Madame Cama played, when patriotism was sedition and not a paying proposition”. (*An Appeal*—by Dr. Minocher Contractor).

Indira Gandhi has paid her tribute to Madame Cama in her Foreword to a book<sup>1</sup> by Dr. Panchanan Saha:

Madame Bhikhaiji Cama personified the revolutionary spirit of Indian womanhood. She spent long years of her life in a self-imposed exile, arousing European opinion in favour of Indian freedom and giving support and encouragement to a brilliant band of Indian revolutionaries. We remember specially her bold action and pioneering work to popularize our National Flag. It is the tricolour she unfurled, which was adopted, with some alteration, by our freedom movement. Madame Cama's life ought to be better known to the people and particularly the youth of India”. (November 5, 1975).

The tributes were there, but few and far between; the recognition belated and inadequate. Historians have neglected her role, there is no monument to her anywhere in India. But her memory should remain enshrined, not in tangible monuments but in the heart of every patriotic Indian and lovers of liberty

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1. *Madame Cama—Mother of Indian Revolution*

and fighters for freedom everywhere, as one of the most colourful, charming and heroic figures of India's revolutionary struggle, as an ineffaceable symbol of true sacrifice. In the saga of struggle for India's independence she had played a notable part. This unofficial ambassador toured European countries and the U.S.A. pleading justice for India, exhorted Indians to rise above narrow communal considerations; preached the sermon of unity and of non-cooperation and unfurled India's first Tricolour. When forced to violence, she accepted it wholeheartedly and her 'Bande Mataram' message became the manifesto of the Revolutionary Creed. That this outstanding figure, one of the foremost freedom fighters and earliest Internationalists, was an Indian woman, is a matter of pride for our country.

All her life Bhikhaiji Cama had dreamt, in her own words of "an India, free and united"—a Republic with one language, one script and no barriers of caste or creed. That dream was not to be fulfilled in her lifetime. India became free only eleven years later. As for her dream of unity—what with the breakup into two nations with the birth of Pakistan, with linguistic states and with regional and communal feelings rampant even in Independent India,—that dream remains unfulfilled even today. But her unremitting, self-sacrificing toil of three decades, her ceaseless propaganda in her country's cause, her defiant dramatic gesture of raising our National Flag and bringing India's struggle on the international arena, entitles her to the gratitude of the nation and an honoured place among the builders of modern India. Though the independent India for which she strove, suffered and sacrificed so much, came only years after her death and she did not live to see it, her contribution to it has been considerable.

In spite of the long years abroad and her hectic activities there, her heart and mind had remained in her beloved

motherland. In its service she had found joys nobler than personal joys, in living and sacrificing for her country had been her life's triumphant fulfillment—she had moved among great men, witnessed great happenings, taken part in great events. In those dark final days of her life this remained her supreme pride and solace—that she had not failed her beloved Motherland.

As she lay dying, faint rays of the dawn of freedom were discernible on the far horizon and she must have, in her last years realized that her labours had not all been in vain—the dream would be fulfilled some day though she would not be there to see it. In her own words she would only “Hail it, in dying, from afar.” Others, one day, would see the fulfillment of her unfulfilled dreams.

Many years before she had chosen for her tombstone the simple yet stirring words that will continue to inspire for all time, all true lovers of liberty, everywhere. “*Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God*”. These noble lines of her favourite motto, were to be the grace note of her entire career and her most befitting epitaph.



Appendix I

My dear Dadabhai  
Shreevaiv! I am leaving for  
Paris on Thursday the 1<sup>st</sup> March  
as my two months return ticket  
expires on that day.

I need not say again, that  
you can always command  
my services, whenever there is  
an occasion for it, and you  
~~may~~ drop me a line.

C/o Henry S. King & Co  
65 Cornhill - London

With kind regards, to you all  
 in which Mr & Mrs  
 D. P. Cama join.

I remain  
 yours sincerely  
 Chikhaiji Rudron. Cama

Sunday

21/5  
 28/2/1906

C-13(5)  
 25/4/1906

22/2

Appendix II

44 St Marks Road  
North Kensington. W.

30th January 1906

My dear Dadabhai

I feel so much disappointed at the reply you have got from The Irish Party. I hear that your agent McQuinn is gone to Ireland. So let me know, if you think my joining him there would help him to get over the "no".

Just treat me as your own daughter and tell me if you ~~would~~ like to try it, and I ~~will~~ start tomorrow, if it means some real good end.

\* Some people are saying that



there ought to be held ~~monthly~~  
 meetings all over India and  
 then they should send telegrams  
 to Mr Redmond & others, begging  
 for a seat for you. What is  
 your opinion? Do you think  
 one can write to friends like  
 Phirojshah <sup>Mahata</sup> & Dinsha Wacha  
 in private letters, making  
 this suggestion?

With kind regards,

yours sincerely  
 B. R. Cama.

P. S.

We are all so glad  
 that you are coming to  
 lunch with us on Sunday.

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Madame Bhikhaiji Rustom Cama, a demure lady from a traditional Parsi family, was a fiery orator, a nationalist and a freedom fighter. She was the uniting force for various individuals, organizations and agencies outside India in the fight against British imperialism with her uncanny modes and tactics. Joining hands with other leaders of the movement in exile, Bhikhaiji Cama was able to sustain the tempo of the movement through funds collection, initiating patriotism among young Indians who had come for higher education. She surreptitiously published weeklies and articles to awaken nationalist feeling.

Unfurling the first Indian tricolour flag with the words 'Bande Mataram' inscribed on it at the Congress of the Second International at Stuttgart in 1907 was one of the best moments of her struggle against the British. It really took the world by surprise.



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